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ARTHOUS
DIVES
Owen Johnson

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**That wild unleashed kiss burned her lips and cut
across her soul like the sting of a lash.**

FRONTISPIECE. *See page 296.*

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VIRTUOUS WIVES

By
OWEN JOHNSON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
C. H. TAFFS



BOSTON
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FOREWORD

NEW YORK is a city always on the march. It grows as no other city has grown, devouring its past. The great capitals of the world—London, Paris, Rome—present the phenomenon of a stone dropped into a surface of water. The expanding circles of population, widening and receding, leave a central calm—the calm of history, of traditions, of cherished memories, the solidifying calm of monumented generations. But New York is like an up-turned bottle, constantly charged with champagne through its narrow neck, and this restless, increasing pressure, driving from the Battery to Central Park, has not only in one generation consumed its ancient residential area and dispersed its once conservative landmarks but created a new and feverish society.

As late as 1884, when Delmonico's, on Madison Square, was the northern advance of public restaurants, and Wallack's at Thirtieth Street, suffered from its isolation in the theatrical district, New York, from Washington Square to the Grand Central Station, between the iron limits of the elevated railways, was one unvexed stretch of brownstone fronts with high descending steps, which gave to the vistas of its streets the aspect of two brown-clad regiments marching into each other. Each brownstone front was a home. A few apartment houses (called at that time "flats") had made a timid entry, but were associated in the

popular mind with that symbol of the slums, the tenement. The millionaires could be counted on the fingers, and most of them were still waiting their entrance into a rigid society that quoted Emerson, served cold suppers for Sunday, packed the churches, knew no divorce, and brought up its children at home. Thirty years ago, a woman who appeared on the streets rouged and powdered attracted as much attention as a Zulu princess in native costume would to-day.

Toward the end of this decade, the tide of emigration surged in. The first skyscrapers began to multiply. The front offices of the nation were transferred to the lower city, and, from the Battery upward, three great invading columns began their march. Greenwich Village was overrun, Stuyvesant Square isolated, Washington Square invested, and Fifth Avenue began to fall. New York society became a society in retreat, driven toward the park, while historic homes, if they were not leveled to permit the sudden rise of citadels of industry, passed down the inevitable ladder of degradation—from boarding house to furnished rooms, to modified flats, their lowest stories finally converted into laundries, groceries, and cellars for small produce.

There is something grandiose in this spectacle of a city constantly on the march, a spectacle unique in history. In the center, the main attack—the heavy battalions of industry—leveling great areas with its puissant artillery, fortifying each acre conquered with immense redoubts, strikes straight through the heart of a crumbling resistance toward its main objective, the Park, leaving to its covering battalions the task of subjugating those last strongholds of resistance where

the enemy clings to its homes in Washington Square and embattled Murray Hill.

On the West Side, the spreading invasion has been without discipline or directing force — that horde of guerillas, free-booters, and scavengers, which rolls up in the wake of an invasion; a vast, contaminating, pestilential torrent, engulfing the last vestiges of the old Dutch and Colonial life with the greed of a tidal wave. The West Side contains the true slums of the city — slums of little sweatshops and ramshackle factories, slums of stagnant existences where all filth and all degradation, all bleakness and all suffocation, all races, intermingle in the mediocrity of arrested development. It is a region without clear racial definition, except in the upper reaches, where the negro has established himself like a spreading shadow cast by the advancing line of skyscrapers. If this western invasion seems at first formless and without intent, it still flows upward, a soiling barrier from which society recoils as from a pest.

On the East Side, like the cohorts of imperial Rome, an immense army of immigration marches toward the future, nation upon nation treading each other down. What spectacle in history is comparable to this sublime procession of races up the East Side, healing in a generation the ills and outrages of old injustices as flowing water purifies itself, its face to the future, marching toward destiny for its children?

Brawling, quick-witted, gay, the Irish landed first. They formed their clans, fighting for the love of combat, hard drinkers, loyal friends, predestined politicians, establishing themselves in the old Bowery and the now forgotten Five Points, until forced upward by a new wave of refugees from Prussian militarism.

The great disciplined solidarity of Germany arrived, bringing their theaters, their restaurants, their newspapers, their *Turnvereins*, their choral societies — organizers and architects of industry. The Italian immigration and the Russian-Hebrew inflow followed, each in defined waves, washing its precursor further up the island and further up the social scale, founding, in the tenacity of the national instinct, "Little Italy" and the great Yiddish Ghetto. Other waves have rolled in. The first colonies of Italians and Hebrews, always driven upward, have seized possession of the outskirts of the Bronx and overflowed across rapidly multiplying bridges into Williamsburg and into Queens, while below, on the lower East Side, the swarming immigrants still land by the hundreds of thousands, their fortunes on their backs, occupying the lately relinquished tenements in that great cellar to opportunity which lies below Grand Street. This stupendous march of four nations completes the investiture of old New York by piercing its left flank, cutting it off from the river, and crowding it more and more against the eastern boundaries of the park.

What has happened? Just as the discovery of gunpowder destroyed the social state of feudalism, and the invention of the printing press, by the democratic dissemination of knowledge, made possible Cromwell and the French Revolution, so the configuration of New York, which has made the skyscraper a necessity, has determined an unrelenting conflict between the Past and the Present, a war visualized to the minutest military comparison which goes on day by day before our eyes. Below this material destruction and reconstruction, a profound change has been wrought in the soul of the society in flight. In 1890, New York was

a city of homes; to-day, it is a wilderness of transient hotels.

When man had achieved the right to live and had conquered political liberty, there still remained ahead that ultimate human goal toward which all his efforts throughout history have tended, in search of which he has tried every form of government and attempted every code of morality—the pursuit of happiness, the final realization of which lies in ethical and spiritual domains. It is his final judgment on society, by which it stands or falls, for which it has created its forms and established its traditions. Man does not seek to live under a republic, a liberal kingdom, or a beneficent despotism. Instinctively he seeks his individual happiness, but as his soul is not the soul of an ox, to acquire complete happiness he must have the consciousness of freedom to think, to speak, and to act. The conquests of these rights (which we call history) are visible and material. There remains the future of human speculation, that pursuit of happiness which is the inner life of the man himself, in quest of which he has created the symbol of the home and attempted to perfect the convention of marriage.

The most terrifying emotion which he can feel is the sense of detachment which oppresses him when he finds himself unrelated to the progress of the multitude, either by marriage, by the ties of a home, or by intimate association with his fellows. Man is not a solitary creature. His instinct is to associate himself with others in the partnership of his joys and his sorrows. His sanity and morality depend on some responsibility toward others. To him, home is not merely four walls and a roof. It is a symbol. To

supply the need of his imagination, it must have the permanence of a continuing tradition. The two profoundest instincts of which he is capable, which direct him in all his course through life, are the instincts of acquisition and possession. To acquire, to add, is to progress. To possess a home is to give permanence to this progress. For there is a certain immortality about property which extends its consoling significance to its possessor. But to have that sentiment of permanence which is attached to the symbol of the home, he must have his feet planted in the soil. Man does not possess one hundred cubic feet of air sixty feet above the ground.

Three additional developments in New York have been insidiously corrupting the old institution of the home—the telephone, which has leveled its walls; the apartment hotel, which has torn it from the soil, and the automobile, which has finally transferred it to breathless wheels. The modern wife finds the privacy of her bedroom invaded by a swarm of acquaintances who call her up at all moments of the day and night, interrupt her conversations, disturb her sleep, summon her from her table. Her automobile rushes her forty miles away for dinner in a popular restaurant, and she changes her apartment every three years without a memory or a regret.

A new and restless cosmopolitan society has formed, always in motion, without relation to the past or attachment to the present, without definite object ahead except the exigencies of pleasure. In this society, maternity consists in delegating to governesses and boarding schools the education of the children, while matrimony is little more than a legalized method of circulating in society in couples.

When one realizes in the shifting, tireless city of New York the disappearance of the old-fashioned home, the slight authority of the parent generation, the confusion of social standards, the relaxing of religious discipline, one can see that each marriage is to its participants a fact apart, wherein two bewildered mortals are suddenly compelled to establish for themselves, in their search for happiness and mutual respect, some code of standards, responsibilities, and concessions, as though they were themselves creating the institution of marriage.

The one patent social fact to-day is man's injustice to woman in the sentimentalization of her education. As a child, she is taught an excessive value of her own preciousness. As a *débutante*, she is displayed with barbaric luxury in the marts of society, and the crowded years of servitude to pleasure leave her tired, disillusioned, and restless. She marries, and the acquired thirst for sensations tends naturally, after the accident of motherhood, to send her back to the freedom from responsibilities and the need of admiration which was her life as a young girl. In place of a consecrating ideal of duty, which alone can satisfy her spiritual longing for happiness, she is taught at every step to conceive of her privileged existence as the pursuit of pleasure.

In this *parvenu* society (which finds its reflections in certain social sets throughout the country), the women have created a society of sensations never deep or lasting — sensations which must rapidly succeed one another and be constantly intensified. Man to them is a multiple animal; the flattery of the crowd replaces the adoration of the individual. They are capable neither of great passions nor great wickedness, and therefore

easily convince themselves that, despite luxury and pleasure, they are the most virtuous of wives. It is a transitory society, for it is a society profoundly discontented and tragically inconsequential, which will disappear as humanity continues to move restlessly onward, reestablishing its discipline and harking back to old landmarks in its eternal pursuit of happiness.

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PART I

VIRTUOUS WIVES

PART I

I

IT lacked a few minutes to seven by the gilded clock in the brilliant yellow *salon* of the Forresters' apartment on the tenth floor of one of those great stone bastions which a society in retreat has erected to stem the march of the invader. At the first stroke of the hour, Gregory, who had been waiting, entered the red bedroom of his master, and closed the heavy windows, through which, on the crisp September sunshine, the whistled cries of the awakening city were already penetrating. By the time he had arranged the massive lace curtains of the third window, with its slaten sweep of chimneyed roofs and the flowing green of Central Park, Mr. Forrester, who had sprung from his bed at the first knock, was already in his riding breeches and drawing on his boots.

"Well, Gregory, what's the weather?" he cried, with the vigor of a man of strong health who wakes with alacrity to the enthusiasms of the day.

"It's a lovely morning, sir."

"First rate! Tell Morley Mrs. Forrester is not to be disturbed — unless she rings."

"Not to be disturbed — yes, sir," said Gregory, with the impassiveness of forty years of unemotional service.

His recent marriage had changed little in the routine of Andrew Forrester's day. The instinct toward order which dominated his life had made each step so mechanical that Gregory himself had acquired the precision of an automaton. He knew to the second the precise moment when, shaved and refreshed, the master would bolt from the tiled bathroom ready for the tendered shirt and cravat, and when, capped and clothed, he had seen him swallowed up in the voluminous green ulster and conducted him to the waiting elevator, he could have glanced at his watch and pronounced with certitude, "Twenty-two after the hour."

But on the present morning, to his growing astonishment, when he had offered the gray woolen riding shirt, instead of the customary snap and celerity, he perceived a look of abstraction on the still young face of his master—a face which, despite its first impression of agreeable ugliness, had a contagious radiance of success, confidence, and decision. Instead of extending his hand for the stock which Gregory held tenderly poised, Mr. Forrester wandered over to the window and stood staring out on the golden city, hands pocketed, whistling windily the soldiers' chorus from "Faust." He came back frowning, his glance in the distance, and extended his arms for his jacket.

"Beg pardon, sir — your stock."

"What? Oh, yes."

He took the stock, tied it hastily, and, slipping into his riding coat, started for the door.

"Beg pardon, sir; you've forgotten your watch and wallet."

"Hullo, so I have — that's queer!"

"It is queer," said Gregory to himself, when Mr. Forrester had disappeared by the elevator. "Some-

thing is on his mind, that's flat." And returning to the servants' dining room, where Morley, the lady's maid, was breakfasting luxuriously on a grapefruit with the addition of a pot of cream which Quito, the Japanese cook, had offered in respectful admiration, he inquired,

"Bit of a tiff last night between the master and the missis?"

"Bit of a what?" said Morley, with a frigid stare, for she resented the condescension of his attitude.

"Bit of a tiff."

"Go on now," said Morley, shrugging her shoulders; "can't you see beyond your old polished nose? Why, they are like turtle doves together, stupid."

"The missis is not to be waked," said Gregory, surveying the evidences of petty peculations on the table. "Master's orders."

"As though she intended to get up at such an hour, the pretty dear!" said Morley, shrugging her shoulders, with instinctive hostility toward the husband's pretensions.

"It's a pity she does n't. She might find something to interest her if she would take the pains to look," said the butler, with a scornful glance. "Pity you would n't breakfast on champagne and humming-birds' wings!"

He was of the old order and, if he availed himself of an occasional glass or a cigar, he never stole beyond the traditions of his position, while the extravagance, the disorder, and the waste which reigned in the kitchen profoundly shocked his sense of loyalty toward the master, whom, as a bachelor, he had protected from other transgressors.

Meanwhile Forrester, out in the open, swinging

powerfully toward his riding club through the sleepy mobilization of the army of labor, which, soiled, and dusty, crowding surface cars, disgorging from the subway, streamed toward the river, the docks, the excavations, and the waiting furnaces, was saying to himself,

“ Shall I take it or not? ”

He had placed the question fifty times since yesterday, and had come no nearer to an answer. This, in itself, was unusual, for he prided himself on his power of instant decision. There was no hesitancy in his soaring nature, and he tolerated none in his subordinates of the Cambridge Structural Steel Works, of which, at the age of thirty-five, he was already the general manager.

“ A year ago, I would have jumped at the chance,” he said to himself in surprise — a year ago he had had no thought of marriage. “ It ’s big! ”

He entered the riding club, still absorbed in his perplexity. From the urchin in buttons to the stable boy who held his horse, everyone greeted him with extra eagerness. He was a favorite with all the servants, not only for the sense of health and good humor which he communicated but for an exact discipline, tempered with a prodigal generosity. He was well served, and served with respect. He had the best horse, the finest equipment, and the most expert groom. Wildfire, a coal-black Kentucky thoroughbred, was capering in the sawdust. Forrester examined the bit with care, ordered the girth tightened, and, swinging into the saddle, went clattering into the park, where the horse broke into a headlong gallop. The mounted policeman smiled tolerantly at his lawless passage, flattered to be distinguished by name by

one who had the intimacy of such rulers of destiny as magistrates and commissioners.

The sun was yet young in the sky, the air delicious, and a little dew hung in the dark-green shadows. Forrester snatched off his cap and stuffed it in his pocket and, reveling in the cut of the wind, which made his body tingle with a consciousness of his youth and strength, drove Wildfire into a frenzied rush. Though he rode without the elegance of the classic style — he used a Mexican saddle with box stirrups in loyalty to early training on the Western plains — he had that spirit of mastery which a horse instantly recognizes, and held his seat where many a more graceful rider might have wavered.

He rode at life as though he were riding at a high hurdle. Each salient feature seemed fashioned by the action of tempestuous elements, like the sharpened figurehead of a ship worked by wind and wave — the keen, vulturelike nose under the open flight of the eyebrows, the lean, starting cheek bones, the worn maxillary muscles of the jaw, the set, crooked tenacity of the lips, while the black abundant hair, slightly shot with silver, rippled back from the thin forehead, past the large ears, which adhered to the skull as though blown against it by the rapidity of his progress through life. The first impression was of gauntness, of primitive force, of crude vitality, but, with this, there was such naturalness, such boyish zest in the lighted gray of his glance, such resonant friendliness in the deep bass of his voice, such a swing of success and power in his bearing that this overflowing quality of good humor, confidence, and decision exerted a distinct physical exhilaration upon all persons with whom he came in contact. At the upper end of the

reservoir, he reined in abruptly for a bantering discussion of the approaching baseball championship with Corcoran, the officer on duty, and bolted away on his return trip.

"I'll put it over until to-morrow," he said, thinking of the momentous decision he would be called upon to make.

Other problems were clamoring for immediate adjustment. This violent racing half hour was indeed not a relaxation but the beginning of his working day. The sensation of speed gave him the sensation of power. Under this stimulus, his mind experienced an extraordinary clarity. He was of that new electric business temperament, which is given to the masters of New York, who ride the shock and fury of its combat as the *aëroplane* soars above the shock and fury of the storm—a type which has a marked resemblance to those abnormal masters of the air, whose nerves, far from breaking under the shriek and roar of motors, the giddy rise or sickening drop on treacherous air currents, or faltering at the inhuman spectacle of swimming earth and unstable skies, derive, on the contrary, an intense emotion of freedom and power, a superhuman delight in combat, a joy in returning to life, where normal imaginations would collapse. The clamor and shock of the city, the shattering iron beating against the ear of train, trolley, truck, and steam riveter, of all the hideous uplifted scream of the day, which fatigues the ears of the New Yorker and leaves its straining lines across his eyes and lips, was to Forrester a nervous, combustible chemistry. It awoke every mental faculty. It surrounded his intellect with a protecting wall of noise and permitted it a steady concentration.

"Peters is not the man for the operating department," he said to himself rapidly. "Ideas but no order. No economy. Fromme's my man. The overhead expenses can be cut another hundred thousand. By the way, Dickson can dispense with a third stenographer," he added, his mind leaping from big to trivial details. "I must shave down my bid on that Argentine contract. Wonder if Argulés is straight. I must have that contract."

The great neglected field of South America stirred his imagination, and he sought a means of making sure of the contract without offense to his conscience, which was built on the letter of the law. At the same time, he did not intend to overlook the possibility of another competitor acting with less scruple. He decided to employ that classic method of conversion, by which great industries assimilate the fearless Federal inquisitor. He decided to digest Argulés.

"I need a representative for that field, a very comfortable commission he can make of it, too," he said, smiling. Instead of handling Argulés at this end, which was repugnant to him, it should be a straight transaction—a retaining-fee and a liberal commission. What was done at the other end was not his affair. By the time he had returned to the club, he had passed upon a dozen bids which he would be called upon to offer or accept, appropriated twenty-five thousand dollars for a test of a new Swedish separating process, and planned a personal visit to the Pennsylvania foundries, where a knotty question with a labor union had to be met with tact.

Back in his apartment, he passed under the cold sting of the shower and, glowing from a vigorous friction, dressed rapidly while giving his orders for the day.

"The blue suit, Gregory. Pack up my things for over Sunday. Tell Bingham the car at four. Better slip in my riding togs; I might want them." As this visit, the first of his married life, represented to him a social departure, he went to his bureau and carefully selected a handful of cravats in dark, solid colors. "A couple of silk shirts and, instead of my riding clothes, put in my golf suit and a brown cutaway — that ought to do." He went into the hall and returned to add, "And, Gregory, a pair of pumps, also."

This week-end invitation to the Dellabarres, at Chilton, was an event of such troubling importance that he felt the need of superior counsel. He passed into the great tiled bathroom which separated his room from his young wife's, and, tiptoeing to the door, listened hopefully. He had given orders that she should not be wakened — and yet he had hoped that just this one morning she might be up, radiant and girlish in her pink panne-velvet morning gown, giving a glow of fragility and gentleness to the breakfast table, to which for such long years he had come with the feeling of a lunch counter. He listened, and then, concealing his disappointment, went into the green dining room, where his eggs, which had boiled three and a half minutes, were waiting at his place, with three newspapers and the morning mail. He deviated again from his military schedule and, approaching the white marble fireplace, in which a gas fire was licking imitation logs, turned to survey with a feeling of still new possession the heavy rococo walnut furnishings, the massive candelabra, the stout silver service, and the flagrant red-and-white sporting prints — an assemblage which pleased him enormously with its substantial elegance. Standing thus, confident, suc-

cessful, and alone, before an imitation hearth in an imitation home, he might have served as a symbol of modern individualism.

But Forrester was conscious of no lack. A decade of boarding houses, hotels, and bachelor lodgings had left him with the feeling that home was a sort of inner office. Not that, in the background of his imagination, he did not have a visualization of another home, set under the shelter of whispering trees, with memories of other hands on olden sofas and reveries in the depths of charred fireplaces. Only, this was for the future. For the present, he wished to enjoy, and to enjoy in the richness of his youth. He had the need of the self-made man to visualize his success, of being seen, of parading the beauty and charm of the young wife, whom he had chosen, as he chose his chef, his chauffeur, and his tailor, with the instinct to achieve the rarest.

"Decidedly I shall refuse. I have enough," he said to himself suddenly. "In five years, I should be a millionaire — but what five years!"

The offer which he had all at once determined to refuse was this: The day before, no less a personage than T. P. Gunther himself, organizer of colossal enterprises, one of the three despots of the Street, in whose hands lay the gift of a hundred fortunes, had personally offered him the presidency of the Osaba Refining and Smelting — a vast property recently consolidated by his interests in the mining districts of Arizona and northern Mexico. The offer had been peculiarly tempting in financial opportunity, but the condition was attached that he should not relinquish office before five years.

"No; I have enough," he repeated, with a smile.

But this extraordinary and un-American expression in a country where the rich grow progressively poorer was not as limiting as it appeared. In his contentment, he embraced not only his present situation but that future success which he could count upon as his reorganization of the Cambridge Structural Steel made itself felt.

He established himself at the table for that triple process of breakfasting, to which he ordinarily allotted ten minutes of his schedule, and which consisted in devouring three or four courses while he digested the news of the day in the headlines of two papers propped up before him and sorted his correspondence. From his mail, he carefully selected a dozen bills for Miss Burroughs, the social secretary he had generously provided for his wife, who, at the end of the month, would give him the total required.

He finished breakfast, glanced voraciously through a third paper, lit his morning cigar, and, as though staggered by the grandeur of the renunciation, brought forth pencil and paper in the need of visualizing his situation. He drew a neat dividing line, jotting down in parallel columns the figures of the decision he intended to make.

"Let's see how we stand: I have forty thousand in good securities at four and a half per cent plus one thousand shares of Cambridge, market value fifty-five thousand — will go to par in three years. Adding my salary of twenty-five thousand, which certainly will be increased on the publication of my year's report, I can count on a capital of at least one hundred and fifty thousand within three years." He contemplated the figures, which, to his imagination, crowned twenty years of struggle as with a monument and, to his

vision of a bachelor, they seemed grandiose. "Now for the other side. Salary fifty thousand, bonus twenty thousand shares of the new common stock, put out at ten dollars a share." He stopped and, before his eyes, the figures expanded with the vision of the future. He multiplied them by twenty, by thirty, and by fifty, inscribing, in glowing progression, the sums which represented the mounting fortune his efforts could accomplish. "Yes; in five years I'd be a millionaire. But those five years — that's just the point!"

He rose and entered the brilliant yellow *salon* for the morning survey of what he had himself assembled for the coming of his bride. It was heavy; it was massive, and it was gorgeous. A dozen eras crowded together, Louis XVI, Empire, Colonial, and Heppelwhite, amid a profusion of Japanese prints, modern porcelains, and imitation flowers. In this herding of bric-à-brac, his eye detected a vacant corner which offended it, and he remembered a bronze on a marble pedestal which would fill in exactly.

"I'll have it sent up as a surprise to the missis," he said, delighted. He loved the room with the wholesome joy of possession. "Well, Andrew B. Forrester, I guess we've settled that," he said, but a little doubtfully. "Years are more precious than money, and I've earned the right to take it easy. In four or five years, when she's had a chance to play, we can buy a country place and settle down. Children — yes; I suppose that will be all right then. There ought to be some one to inherit what I have to leave. I've got enough as it is — I'm satisfied. That's settled. Everything's settled."

He thought of his young wife with a sudden feel-

ing of tenderness, pride, and gratitude. His pride in her possession was the pride of his whole self-made existence in achieving the impossible, and his gratitude was deepest of all that, at the critical period of his life when emerging from the struggle for power, at that dangerous age when the self-made man, in this first leisure, experiences the temptation of a boy of twenty, she had brought to him contentment, order, and security when other men found themselves distracted and torn by a life of dissipation. It is at this point where, in his simple faith, he saw an end, that the human drama which awaits the shock of opposite sexes, the action and reaction of one mind on another, the conflict of wills, of instincts, and of temperaments, was preparing its beginning.

II

WELL after nine o'clock, little Mrs. Forrester awoke with a start, as she had done each morning of the two weeks in her new surroundings, with a feeling of being lost in some strange land. For a moment, still caught in a passing dream, it seemed to her that she was turning in the perfumed crush of one of the brilliant balls which had crowded her last year's appearance in society.

"I must be dreaming," she said to herself, with an effort. "That can't be. I know very well that I am in my little blue room and old Hannah is coming in with the coffee and the roses. That's it. I'm waking up."

Smiling to herself, she succeeded in half opening her eyes. But instead of the mahogany footboards and the casement window with red ramblers nodding across the gray thread of the far-off Hudson, she beheld something draped and lacy above her head, and then, through the diluted shadows of the Louis XVI bedroom, a shining dressing table weighted down with silver, a white-and-gold *chaise longue*, while from a corner, hazily giving back her own image in the canopied paneled bed, a cheval glass grew from the floor to the ceiling of the soft pink room. She had again an acute feeling of strangeness. But all at once she began to laugh.

"Oh, yes — I'm married, and I must get up in time to breakfast with Andrew." At this moment,

her glance encountered the accusing face of a jeweled clock. "Half-past nine! Oh dear, I never seem to get up, and I ought to — it's — it's my duty. I must — to-morrow. Poor dear boy, it's so lonely! If I telephoned him —" A little hand groped for the receiver and stopped. "No, no — too sentimental, Amy! He won't say anything, but he won't like it. That horrid business! Oh, dear, I must grow up!"

To grow up and to get up were two ideas hopelessly entangled in her foggy mind. She rang for her maid and went off into dreams, wherein were strangely mingled rapid nights of social pleasures and memories of the sheltered home of her childhood, where everything had revolved about her, where her father, Judge Starling, and her uncle Tom carried her round on their shoulders as though determined that she should never grow up. She was not yet twenty-one. She had made her *début* in society the year before, and her abrupt marriage to Andrew Forrester the summer after a frantic season, which had left her a few illusions and a part of her health, had been a mystery to her intimates and a shock to a multitude of more or less fervent admirers.

Five minutes later, Morley's bleached features appeared behind the massive silver breakfast service (a gift of Forrester's business associates). The maid set the tray gingerly down, and stood a moment, contemplating the charming figure of her young mistress.

"She is quite too ravishing," she said contentedly. "How in the world did *he* ever get her? Pretty little beauty!"

In that miraculous garden, America, where a virgin soil and an ardent sky combine to produce exquisite human flowers, she was of the most delicate loveliness.

She slept lightly, her dainty head pillowed against one soft white arm, and everything in the modeled oval of her face seemed alert and on the wing — the thin hazel eyebrows which were lifted until they seemed to form an acute angle on the forehead, the slender nose a little in the air, the thin upper lip rising to a point above a line of teeth that glistened like milky beads, while the red splash of the under lip was sensitive and full with the already awakened instinct toward the pleasant intoxication of the senses. The light and abundant hair was drawn clear of the neck, which was as fragile as the support of a Venetian vase. In all this there was something that hovered like the pleasure of a hidden perfume — the spirit of unconscious pleasing which remained in spite of her first contact with the artificial world, a charm which was not yet of art or experience but of youth and anticipation, a charm that was just beginning.

When she again awoke, it was past ten o'clock, and the telephone at her bed was buzzing imperiously. She took up the receiver with some petulance.

"Amy, it's Fifi!"

She gave a cry of delight at the sound of her cousin's voice.

"How wonderful — you darling! Where are you? What are you doing?"

"Down to shop. Crazy to see what you look like. How's married life? May I peek in on you? . . . I may? . . . In half an hour — gorgeous! So long!"

"What did we do last night?" said Amy to herself, rising reluctantly. She remembered that they had gone to the theater and then to a roof garden to dance until after two. "To-night early to bed," she said, with a touch of remorse. "I've kept him up every night this week, and Andrew *must* work."

All at once, she recalled with delight the invitation to the Dellabarres. In the fortnight since their return, she had seen no one in the deserted city, and the isolation had weighed heavily. She was looking forward to her entrance into the younger married set with a little apprehension and much pleasant excitement — apprehension at this coming contact with the brilliant women of the world, and excitement because she knew she had nothing to fear.

There was about this invitation, moreover, a side which she had not quite divulged to her husband. When Mr. Dellabarre had stopped to speak to them in a restaurant, she was then so overwhelmed with loneliness that she had instinctively put herself out to a little more than please. When the invitation had arrived, three days later, she had experienced a sudden return of that intoxicating sense of power which she had felt so often in the year of her *début* whenever she had come victoriously into a public place.

"Never mind the eggs, Morley — just heat up the coffee," she said apologetically, as she slipped a tiny foot into the fur slipper and felt the luxurious warmth of her eider-down peignoir — Andrew's gift — close over her shoulders.

This *bourgeois* consideration for the chef shocked Morley.

"Not at all, madam; the eggs and the coffee are quite spoiled," she said, and departed with dignity for a new breakfast.

Back from her bath, indolently installed in the deep cushion of the *chaise longue*, Amy Forrester began the perusal of her morning mail while Morley arranged the second breakfast. There were letters from schoolgirl chums, *débutantes* of last year, with highly

colored descriptions of their eager ventures into the painted gardens of society. She smiled over their extravagances, and smiled, too, at herself, wondering if their vision or herself were the more unreal — a child installed over three servants and a chauffeur — and, of course, the destinies of a husband. For, sometimes in the reveries of the day, she awoke with a start and asked herself how it all had happened.

“Will you take your breakfast now, madam?”

Morley's question had the sound of an ultimatum. She glanced up guiltily, very tiny in the *chaise longue*, like a little *marquise* of the days when Boucher drew. Morley always seemed to be watching for her mistakes. It gave her the feeling of going to school for the first time.

“Yes, I'm ready, and, Morley, bring in any packages that have come.”

She breakfasted rapidly on a new variety of hot-house melon, which she had found in a Fifth Avenue fruit store, eggs and cream from a fancy dairy, with a slice of the finest Virginia razor-back ham. While Morley removed the tray, she delved into the pyramid of boxes which represented an average day's shopping — gloves, shoe buckles, a lace collar, a new perfume to try, some candied fruits, a warmer fur rug for the car, two blouses, and a traveling hat. She had not the slightest conception of such social annoyances as addition of expenses and subtraction of income. Why should she?

At the age of twelve, two years after the death of her mother, her father, in a moment of poignant affection, had said to her:

“Whatever you wish in this world, my little girl, tell me. You shall have it.” Of how deeply her first

season had cut into his capital, she had not the slightest conception. Her aunt had never interposed an objection to her whim. Whatever she wanted, she bought — for shopping was such fun.

“Quito is ready for his order, madam.”

A trim young Japanese, in white piqué, wobbled in, smiling. The blue eyes of Mrs. Forrester assumed an expression of appropriate gravity.

“We ’ll be two at luncheon,” she said, frowning with the intensity of the mental effort involved. There was a pause.

“Bouillon — some fishy?”

She nodded and said firmly,

“Yes — then after the fish a *filet mignon*.”

“How?”

“Oh, with —” She came to a full stop. “Just fix it up in some nice way and get whatever’s best in fresh vegetables. Then some sort of a salad and a dessert — the kind you made yesterday. And, Quito, we ’ll be going away over Sunday.” A long pause. “Get whatever’s necessary for the kitchen.”

Quito disappeared, smiling his toothy, Oriental smile, while Mrs. Forrester, these fatiguing household duties accomplished, returned to her reveries.

She felt that she had nothing to do. The third month of her married life found her restless and bewildered, and if to Andrew their marriage seemed the resolution of all his perplexities, to her it appeared as the opening of all her problems. The sensation of being abandoned, isolated, and alone possessed her completely in the gorgeous apartment of which her hands had not chosen a single bit of furniture. Everything had been prepared for her coming, even in her bedroom, from the thick golden carpet to the crowded

knick-knacks on the mantel, even to the marvel of panne velvet and chinchilla which wrapped her little body — all had been chosen for her. At times, it gave her a feeling of discomfort — as though there were something immoral in her accepting all this luxury.

Yet she had been brought up to consider herself an object of luxury, and all her education had tended to enhance this value. Every responsibility had been carefully spared her. All her life she had been petted and spoiled and forbidden to grow up. Andrew had but followed her father and uncle Tom — Andrew, who adored to snatch her up from the ground and swing her to his shoulder.

She smiled pensively as she recalled the first time it happened. They were in the old English garden, under the crooked cherry tree, the second day of their engagement. That morning, she had been full of doubts and hesitations, yes, even of terror, as she walked by his side and watched him, wondering what force had bent her to this stranger who had descended into her life with such imperious conquest. All at once he had laughed and swung her to his shoulder, and, in the sensation of riding so lightly, so securely, all her questionings had vanished. This must be the buoyant force to carry her slightly indolent nature out and up into the great world of pleasant happenings. When she thought of her husband even now, she thought of herself above his shoulder, carried lightly along, looking down at his eyes, which grew young as a boy's as they turned to her in pride and adoration. She smiled again, persuading herself that there was something symbolic about it — what marriage should be.

"Madame is taking three evening gowns?" said Morley, returning. She drew a peignoir over her

young mistress's shoulders, brushing out the long mole-colored hair that, in its undulations, had certain faint violet tints. "The Dellabarre's is a fine house. They do a lot of dressing there. Chilton is a very smart place, lots of polo and gentlemen riding. They do drink like lords. I was at Chilton three years with Mrs. Challoner. She is quite the fashionable beauty, though her hips are bad, but she gets over that very well with these new corsets. Mrs. Challoner and Mrs. Dellabarre are great friends, though they do fight over a man like panthers. Mrs. Challoner is a beast to serve, though. I gave notice when she threw a water jug at the second man, and a pretty penny it cost the master, too, hushing it up. He's a beast, too — but she handles him!"

Little Mrs. Forrester was not listening to these revelations about the beautiful Mrs. Challoner, whom a foreign portrait painter, before presenting his bill, had pronounced the most perfect blond in America. She was still in the past.

How had it happened? She had passed through her first season without time for any other emotion but the appetite for changing pleasures and multiple sensations. She had been surfeited with too much success. Her physical self had finally rebelled at the demands upon it; and, as her nature was neither cold nor calculating, as she had from her home a genuine love of simple things, of nature, and a true kindness of heart, in reviewing the record of the winter, she had asked herself frankly what it had all been worth and where it would lead her. She had felt in her a conflict of natures — one whirling her back into this maelstrom of luxury, selfishness, and of pleasant vanities, and the other recoiling before the inevitable con-

clusion. Andrew had come; a force beyond her reasoning had swept her off her feet. Her deeper nature had seen in him a sign of providence. Marriage to him had seemed the opportunity to live to the fullest, to concentrate the best that was in her, to escape from the dangerous current of adulation and flattery which awaited her on her return — a danger she was young enough to recognize. What troubled her now was that it was all so different from what she had imagined. Her husband was as great a stranger to her as the day he had met her.

“Really, I must do something. I must talk to him and make him understand.”

Yet what she wanted him to understand was hazy in her own mind. There was something wrong. Whose fault was it? Hers or his?

“Mrs. Dellabarre is n’t as handsome as Mrs. Chalonier, but she makes more show. Mrs. Dellabarre has very fine taste,” continued Morley; “she gives out for twenty-six, but she must be a year or two closer than that. He’s getting on to fifty. He’s an odd one, very attentive to the children. Mrs. Dellabarre ain’t maternal. Her marriage was quite a surprise, they do say. Every one had figured her out for Mr. Bracken — Mr. Monte, that is.”

She rambled on, detailing bits of gossip, painting the society of the younger married set from the pitiless knowledge of the servant world. Amy listened, wondering. It seemed to her that another life lay ahead which was for her to choose, a life of contending vanities, of unceasing rounds of pleasure, wherein she found again all the returned appetite of her season of the year before. Yet, as she was a creature of moods and her moods changed rapidly, already, as

she thought of the coming visit, she was surprised at the feeling of zest which came to her, a feeling of well-being, permeating all her senses.

At this moment Fifi Nordstrum burst into the room and precipitated herself into her arms, almost upsetting the *chaise longue* in the ardor of her embrace.

III

WHAT is called fashionable society, or that portion of it which sets itself a steady task of dining, dressing, and dancing, is divided into two distinct groups: the *débutantes* of the first and second years, who are organized defensively against the married women; and the young married set, about which cluster the foolish virgins of the fifth and sixth seasons. Fifi Nordstrum was a social guerrilla, pursuing her predatory way through all sets. The young matrons feared her; the young *débutantes* imitated her with gushing admiration. She was in her twenty-seventh year, and her portrait and doings were as well known to the readers of Sunday supplements and fashion magazines as the best advertised actress. She had been reported engaged to three celebrities of the headlines — an Arctic explorer, a famous aviator, and the hero of the last international polo match. She knew every one of note from the opera and the stage, where she had the *entrée*, to the latest dancer with whom she danced and the last café favorite who sang his songs to her. She was a dark North-of-Ireland type, without particular beauty except for deep blue eyes that were radiant with animation, and teeth of remarkable whiteness and regularity. Her body was straight and firm as an Indian's, her nose upturned, her mouth thin and wide. She spoke in a high, nervous voice. She walked without grace, and she dressed often with complete disdain for coquetry. But, for all that, she

knew how to place a value upon herself in the eyes of men.

Her first movement, after embracing her cousin with the ardor of a young bear, was to stare at Morley.

"Hullo! What's your name? Seen you before," she said, flinging her furs in the general direction of the maid.

"Morley, Miss Nordstrum; I was three years with Mrs. Challoner."

"Yes; I remember, you were with the Ice-maiden," said Fifi, who resented Mrs. Challoner's sculptural beauty. "Well, Morley, hang up my things in the hall, and don't listen at the door, for we want to be alone."

She dismissed the maid thus in the most natural way in the world, so that Morley, who patronized her mistress, went out laughing. Fifi installed herself by the gas log, drawing up her skirts to warm her legs, lit a cigarette, made a grimace, and flung it away.

"Well, tell me all about it. You beast, you might at least have waited till I got back from California! What made you marry him, anyway?"

"Could n't help it," said Amy, laughing, and forgetting that a moment before she had asked herself the same question.

"That's no answer," said Fifi, looking round. "Who furnished the apartment? Hubby? Heavens, what a scramble!"

Amy burst out laughing, which was the only way to handle her, and brought out two photographs of Andrew, one on horseback, taken on their trip West, and another in football togs, a memento of his college days.

"I see — the cave-man idea," said Fifi, in the slang

of the day. I like ugly men. He's nicer than I expected."

"Keep off!"

"Oh, that kind of man has no use for me."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, no offense," said Fifi, throwing herself back in a chair and plucking out a cigarette which, this time, she continued to smoke with rapid, deep-taken breaths. "Business men are the only real type of Americans — if only they would n't be ashamed of it. The others are imitation, bad European imitation. They don't know how to play. They make love like sand crabs, and they bore you. How can they help boring you when they are bored to death themselves. If you've got nothing to do, you must have brains to do it. Well, if you don't treat Andrew decently, I shall come up and play with him myself."

Amy laughed and replaced the photographs. Fifi's appreciation seemed to make Andrew more real.

"And you?"

"I? I have n't even got my winter engagement. I shall fight the matrons again, I suppose," said Fifi, shrugging her shoulders. "However, I am getting ready for the season. I have joined a complexion party."

"Good heavens, what's that?"

"Helena Partridge is giving it. There are four of us, all freckled. You cover your face with a new cream and keep in a dark room for three days. I want Dolly to marry this season, so I am sacrificing myself." She broke off suddenly. "Are you sorry you are married? Have you seen any men since you've been back?"

Amy was afraid that her cousin would take her

answer from the embarrassment on her face, so she hastened to say:

"Fifi, you are incorrigible! I'm terribly in love — more than ever."

Fifi looked unconvinced.

"Hurry up and dress. Andrew's a self-made man, is n't he? How do you like keeping house? Who's in town?"

"You're the first soul I've seen," said Amy, avoiding the previous questions.

"And the Old Guard?" said Fifi, opening her eyes. "Just because you're married, you're not going to live in a convent, are you?" She glanced admiringly at her cousin, who stood glowing with youth. "Really, Amy, you are too delicious to be married. Oh, you need n't blush, and you need n't say it. You're like all the rest, never going to look at another man. But you'll get over that quick enough. You've got a lot of hearts to break still. Mother will never forgive you. She had picked you out for a duke at least. Well, I want to see him. Telephone down to Andrew and tell him he can take us out for lunch."

"My dear Fifi," said Amy, with a touch of pride, "Andrew is n't lounging around a broker's office —"

"He's an important personage, of course," said Fifi, interrupting; "yes, yes."

"Besides, we are running down to the Dellabarre's this afternoon."

"To Irma? That body-snatcher!" said Fifi, in surprise. "Never mind; I dote on Irma. She's the one really clever woman I know. By the way, just tell her for me that I've made up my mind to play with Monte Bracken this winter, and that she can keep off the reservation."

"I'll be sure to tell her nothing of the kind."

"Then I've a mind to throw the complexion and run over and do it myself," said Fifi, following her out to the elevator. "I'm only a hundred miles away. By the way, you'll probably find an old friend there."

"Who?"

"Tody Dawson," said Fifi, and then, as she saw the dismay on Amy's face, she added, with a laugh: "You innocent thing! Why, he's consoled long ago. He's already one of Irma's crocodiles. You don't know what that is? That's what Irma calls the languishing type of adorers — crocodile tears, you know. I'm crazy about Irma. If I were sure Monte would be there, I would come over and grab him. He's quite exciting — but too dangerous for you, my dear. So don't lose your pretty little head. Is this your car?" she said, examining a magnificent green limousine which was waiting and, without caring whether she was heard or not, she added, "The chauffeur, my dear, is very handsome."

Once inside the luxurious body, dainty as a jewel box, she nodded in appreciation.

"Good for Andrew!"

"We have a runabout, too," said Amy, with a sigh.

Fifi noticed the sigh. Little escaped her, and thinking of all the whirl of gaiety, of flattery, and of admiration that her beautiful cousin had renounced at the end of one season, she put out her hand and patted her shoulder.

"You poor dear!" she said sympathetically.

IV

AT four o'clock, in obedience to a telephone message from the office, Amy was in the car, drawn up by the subway station at Columbus Circle, searching the crowd which flowed muddily up from that great underground tube for the first glimpse of a swinging, rapid figure. Her conscience did not exactly reproach her, for the conscience in youth, before it can enlist the services of a rebellious digestion, is more of a courtier than a mentor. Yet, all the same, she felt she owed it some explanation. She had been frightfully extravagant. When two women go shopping together, the devil begins to smile. The presence of Fifi had incited her. She felt the need of establishing that shade of superiority which her cousin denied her. She knew that Fifi, in common with the rest of her friends, considered that she had thrown away her worldly opportunities, and she desired to rather exaggerate the new independence which was hers. After an orgy among the counters, Fifi, in spite of the fact that luncheon had been ordered at home, had carried her off, commandeering two men by telephone.

The rendezvous had been at Sherry's, just beginning to fill up with the return of society. There were fifty persons she knew, and as Fifi was a public character, their entrance caused quite a stir. She felt instinctively the test of this criticism and asked herself a little anxiously how they would judge her. In an

instant, she was back in the life of the year before, the old chatter rising easily to her lips, eager for the glances of tribute which she could detect in the crowd. She felt a new vivacity, and it seemed to her, for the first time in months, that the radiance of her youth was returning to her eyes and to her glowing cheeks. She forgot her perplexities and half-expressed longings. This world welcomed her back by a hundred solicitous attentions, claiming her charm and her beauty. She no longer had a feeling of isolation.

What was strange was to be waiting for him. When he was absent, she could never see him distinctly.

In the crowd, she saw the kind, ugly face, and, at his powerful, confident approach, she had a swift feeling of gladness and delight.

"All right, Bingham; good time, but don't get caught!" He swung into his seat, and the coupé was filled with his virile, conquering strength. "Kept you waiting long? Turn around, Mrs. Yum-Yum; let's see how pretty we are!"

At the pride with which he gave her his favorite nickname, the little girl from school began to laugh. Then she remembered.

"I've been awfully extravagant," she said contritely, and the obnoxious word "extravagant," like the terrifying word "duty," she pronounced in a way that made him break into laughter.

"I make it; you spend it," he said, taking her hand. "The best, and damn the expense!"

"No, really, Andrew; you should scold me."

"Really?"

"Yes, really," she said, with a mischievous smile. Then she added, serious once more, for it shocked her

in her sense of fitness that he did not reprove her a little, "If you did, it would make me feel loads better."

Andrew had already forgotten the incident. He examined her with affectionate pride as his glance, satisfied, ran over the trappings of his car and rested, in final approval, on the trim figure of Bingham. Bingham was in excellent style. They were at the throat of the great Queensboro Bridge, halted in the jam of traffic. Other cars were about them. He estimated them with a little righteous pride in his own wife, his own car, and his own chauffeur. He had done it all, and he feared no comparison.

His hand closed over hers, with the feeling that life was now happily settled and the road clear ahead.

"Fifi came in and carried me off to luncheon at Sherry's," she said. "Any number of persons came up to see me. My head's quite turned with compliments. Do you know a Mr. Argesinger and a Mr. Devine — Wall Street men, friends of Fifi?" She hesitated a moment, then added, "They lunched with us."

He looked at her without the slightest shade of jealousy, overjoyed at her triumph.

"Just what you need! Play all you want; nothing would please me more."

As he said these words, his voice was so gentle that a great wave of tenderness went through her.

"How kind and big he is!" she thought to herself, with a little remorse.

"What dresses have you brought?"

"The black, the gold, and the cerise."

He frowned at the mention of this last, for, in the perfect chivalry of his attitude toward women, he was, by training, old-fashioned.

"The cerise, my dear, is — I'm not quite sure. The Dellabarrs are quite conventional, are n't they?"

She smiled from her superior knowledge.

"I'm afraid you're in for a shock. Chilton is rather the riding set."

"True; but they are mostly families like the Dellabarrs and Brackens, who have had money for generations. They'll be — a little rigid — especially the women. That's why I would n't wear the cerise gown, not just at first — not to-night."

"But with a scarf, Andrew!" she exclaimed, amused at his naïve conception of a strange world.

"Well, suppose we wait and see. Now for some bad news. I've got to pass to-morrow night with Gunther on his yacht. The king has summoned me."

"What — to-morrow! Our first visit together!" she cried, cut to the quick.

"But, Amy, do you know who Gunther is?" he answered, astonished.

"I don't care who he is. He can wait."

She had not the slightest idea of Gunther's importance. To her the blow was a vital one, directed at all her prerogatives as a wife. She withdrew her hand, turning toward the window to hide the tears which rose to her eyes.

"It's something I can't refuse," he said slowly. "I must have Gunther for a friend. It is a great opportunity for me."

"Am I invited, too?"

He hesitated.

"It is not a pleasure party. You don't understand. Gunther has offered me a position which would mean we'd be millionaires in five years. Whether I accept or refuse, I must make him interested in me."

"Millionaires! Really? Then why do you hesitate?" she said, her chagrin forgotten — for this word "millionaire" had to her ears the charm of a fairy tale.

"Well, I've been slaving for twenty years," he said slowly. "It would mean five years more and a lot of it away from New York — and you."

She was of a primitive, emotional nature, quick to every influence. Before his generosity, she answered impulsively,

"Not from me. Wherever you go, I go."

And in saying this, she believed it.

"No, no," he said, his frown disappearing as if by magic; "you are young; you're going to enjoy yourself. I carried you off because I was n't taking chances. But you're not going to regret anything you might have had. No, sirree; nothing is going to make me quite so happy as sitting back and watching you sweep them off their feet. The best for you! And I shan't be jealous at all if men admire you — quite the contrary."

She was silent, profoundly moved. In these few moments, he had come closer to her than in all the months she had known him.

"Yes; you are right," she said, with such gratitude in her blue eyes that he had never seen them more beautiful. "Give me a year or two, dear. I am only a girl, and it is awfully hard to settle down and be serious just yet. I know that it won't last — I shall get tired of it — but just now — I do want to be seen, admired, flattered — I do want to play."

He laughed in his deep, hearty rumble, a weight lifted from his mind.

"Play," he said, smiling; "play for both of us, and

if you want any more money, just say so and I'll make it." She turned to his arms impulsively, and to each, in the happiness of this new understanding, it seemed that all problems of marriage were happily resolved. "Now let me explain my position," he said gently, "and wherein you can help me. I have gotten to the point where I am strong enough to need friends. Dellabarre is an old foggy, but he's got property and connections. Make him our friend. I've gotten to where I am now, without having to say 'Thank you' to any one, but now I intend to use every arm that comes handy. Make friends; make friends," he said, listening to his own words. "You never know when the weakest hand can give just that last little push that will topple over the rock. You see, I am at a critical moment."

"What do you mean?" she said anxiously, for she had not the slightest knowledge of his business affairs.

"I am about to be known as a successful man. When my January report is out, I shall have a dozen enemies after my scalp. You don't understand? Here's the situation: American business is war. We are not shopkeepers, piling up reserves in our safes. We are speculators, adventurers, fighters, and we fight not for avarice but for the pure joy of combat. You never see any such motto as 'Live and let live' hung up in an American office. Oh, no! If you come up out of the crowd, you've got either to impose yourself or be crushed. Hit them first! This is where I am."

"But how can they hurt you?"

"If they can't break me, or buy me, or bring me into the family within five years, I shall absorb them. It'll be a fight to the finish. They can't touch me inside my own walls. They can't beat my organization

or buy my lieutenants. Outside, it's different — raw materials, transportation, and credit. But don't worry; I am ready. My alliances are made. That's why Gunther must be my friend."

"But you are going to refuse?"

"I'm going to be cleverer than that. I am going to make him refuse for me," he said, smiling. (He leaned forward, and taking the trumpet, cried cheerily, "To the right, Bingham, and the straight road ahead.") "So we understand each other. You're to play for both of us. It's the time of life to dance and to be extravagant. Do so to your heart's content."

"You need never have any fear."

"Hush," he said gravely, as though the very thought were treason.

She had no fear herself. The world was an immaterial thing, and pleasure had no form to her ardent imagination — least of all a masculine form. A feeling of great content came over her, and, smiling, she lifted his hand to her lips.

"How he loves me!" she thought.

The dusk had been creeping in as they had flown over the smooth macadam roads crowded with automobiles. The air had become moist and chill with the threat of rain which hung in the black drapery of the autumn clouds. Lights had begun to pop out of the darkness, postern lights and home lights, and in the turning of the road she caught flashes of cosy interiors — families gathered at the supper table, mothers with children.

The car slowed down. A flaring light showed the entrance to the drive. A child ran out to swing a gate. Ahead, at the end of the road, which lost itself in a tunnel of shadows under mysterious trees, the house

lights were glowing, afloat on the night. She leaned forward eagerly, gay with anticipation, free now to seek without a qualm all the youth and pleasure ahead under the promise of the lights which fluttered at the end of the deep black way.

There was no one to meet them as they descended, and the great house seemed strangely dark and inhospitable. She felt a splash of raindrops as she hurried into the vestibule. The butler, a family watchdog, eyed them with surprise and indecision, and receiving their names, departed.

"You've made no mistake in the day?" she said, surprised, to her husband.

"No."

At the end of a long wait, a footman hastened to throw on the lights, and suddenly brilliant vistas of halls and *salons* arose before their eyes. The butler returned precipitately, followed by a rapid, noiseless person, who introduced herself as Miss Bane, the housekeeper, and made nervous excuses for their strange reception. Underneath all this was such a feeling of agitation and confusion that Mrs. Forrester, her curiosity awakened, glanced at her husband. But Andrew perceived nothing. He was in admiration before the simple elegance of the baronial entrance, noting every detail, registering each effect which pleased him, making mental comparisons, already perceiving new worlds to attain.

V

SINCE the morning, the Dellabarre household had been in an uproar, the guests uncomfortably conscious of eavesdropping, Mr. Dellabarre sulking, the children neglected, while Miss Bane ran to the telephone to command or countermand the car, postpone the dinner, and send frantic inquiries for Mrs. Clove, Mrs. Dellabarre's mother, who was sorely needed to restore the peace.

While the servants were in a panic for the security of their winter positions; while the guests — Mrs. Lightbody, young Dawson, and Laracy — had fled to the country club for lunch; while the children had covered themselves with grease at the garage and were bawling at the top of their lungs; while Mr. Dellabarre was savagely pacing his library with a longing to smash the mantel ornaments, Irma Dellabarre, quietly ensconced on a Recamier *chaise longue*, by the flowery window of her little morning room, was solicitously brushing the coat of Mon Amour, the Pekinese.

At four o'clock, her mother arrived like a gust of wind that sets every door in the house to banging. Though Mrs. Clove experienced not the slightest anxiety at these periodic summons, she came all in a flutter, prepared to stretch her visit to agreeable proportions by agreeing both with her daughter, whom she idolized, and with her son-in-law — first, because she was sure he would be in the right, and, second,

because she had that sense of gratitude which is the lively looking-forward to favors to come.

"My poor darling," she cried, after the first sympathetic embrace, "I was afraid I'd find you in tears!"

"I? No; why should I?" said Irma, rising to put Mon Amour in his pink cradle. Whatever her feminine subterfuges, she never deceived herself in her domestic relations. "I suppose I've been stupid somehow; but, Lord, I can't imagine where!"

"Well, dear, who is it this time?" said Mrs. Clove, drawing off her gloves. From behind she had the figure of sixteen. She dressed in baby pinks and blues, and might have passed for the early thirties — that custom-made age, toward which *débutantes* and grandmothers now incline.

"Heavens, if he'd only say! But you know Rudy. He's capable of sulking a week before I can get it out of him."

Mrs. Clove, reassured, looked at her daughter with the keenness of one who avoided expressing her thoughts in words.

"No; I assure you," said Irma, in response to the unspoken question. "This time, I have n't the slightest idea of whom he's jealous."

The mother, who had come to that age when a compensating Providence replaces the distractions of youth by the arrival of interesting ailments, had a private conviction that these temperamental outbursts had a bilious origin, but as this extreme view had found no favor, she contented herself with an admiring glance.

"My darling child, how can he be angry at anything so lovely as you are?"

Irma smiled. She adored compliments, even from

her own mother. She had a sense of the scenic, and even in her own bedroom, kept in the picture. Her charm was of art rather than from natural gift, for while her body was slender and graceful, her head, which was Latin, was striking, though the boldness of her forehead was softened by the deep black hair which had been directed in curling abundance about the temples. Her eyebrows were bold; her nose too aquiline, but her teeth shone brilliantly against the duskiness of her complexion and the brilliant rouge of her lips. What was really striking were the eyes, which were of a thin gray, so clear and so light, that they gave the effect of being as transparent as the negligée which floated lightly about her in a cloud of costly old lace which had cost the price of a season's wardrobe.

"My dear mother," she said calmly. "You don't know Rudy. Appreciate what he's got? Why, he would be delighted if I'd go in flannel wrappers and braid my hair like a dowdy little *Hausfrau*. I don't see how I stand it. He's getting more and more impossible."

Mrs. Clove, with the memory of twenty lean years in genteel boarding houses, appreciated what sacrifices her daughter had been called upon to make.

"Tell me all about it," she said, patting her hand with sympathy.

Irma raised her eyebrows.

"Good heavens, mother, there's nothing to tell! He's been making a scene about everything but the real reason." She hesitated and added, "He began by giving up his hunting trip."

Mrs. Clove did not disguise her surprise. For Mr. Dellabarre to renounce his semiannual outing was a fact of revolutionary importance.

"As serious as that?"

"Yes."

"It's a man, of course?"

"Of course."

"And you really have no idea?"

"No, no."

The second negative and the impatient shrug which accompanied it confirmed Mrs. Clove in her suspicions. She rose and went down to the den. Mr. Dellabarre was walking back and forth before the fireplace with such precise little steps that one could almost imagine the creaking of the joints.

"Ah, there you are!" he said, with a sudden treble rise in his weak voice, but, correcting himself, he added ceremoniously, "How do you do? I am very glad indeed to see you."

He gave his hand limply as though he were making her a present of it, and suddenly reddened with embarrassment, for his pride was excessive, and he suffered during these scenes which his timidity prolonged.

He was a gray, perpendicular little man, passing fifty, with a short, stubby nose, overhanging eyebrows, and a gray, drooping mustache, a drooping glance, and a voice which drooped into whispers. He held himself stiffly, and his arms and legs moved on hinges. He dressed in a stiff gray cutaway, which appeared newly starched, square-toed boots, and a made-up tie of pepper and salt, pierced by a fat cameo pin. Eccentric, old-fashioned and furtively shy, there was still a precise dignity about him, which commanded respect, even from the crowd of irreverent youngsters who danced, gambled, and paid their court to his wife.

"Tell me all about it, my dear Rudolph," said Mrs. Clove, with the utmost sympathy. She glanced at the

table which was littered with stray sheets of stamps which he had been sorting — a sure sign of a tempest. "What has that poor child been doing now?"

Mr. Dellabarre instantly began to defend his wife.

"It's my fault. It's your fault — yes, of course it's your fault," he said in jerky sentences, after a glance at the door. "It's the fault of American education, of the ridiculous way we permit young girls to be brought up. Irma is what we have made her. Yes; but that does n't help any, and that is n't the point," he added, suddenly perceiving where this would lead him. "She has her side, but I have my side, too, and I tell you now I am going to come to a decision."

This was said in rising sentences, while he continued his precise and mechanical stepping off of the carpet, for he experienced the need of heating up his courage. In all this, there was nothing new. So Mrs. Clove contented herself with a sympathetic sigh and the remark,

"It is very sad."

"What do I count for in my own house?" continued Mr. Dellabarre, in a thin complaint. "Nothing! Do you suppose any one ever comes here as my friend?"

"You mean, my dear Rudolph, what does Irma bring to you in your marriage?" said Mrs. Clove, who knew that, so long as he generalized, they would get nowhere.

"Exactly," said Mr. Dellabarre, for unless he had worked himself up into a passion, his pride made him hesitate before taking a third into his confidence.

"But she is no different from others of her set, is she?" continued Mrs. Clove.

"The modern wife is a monster," said Mr. Della-barre angrily. "Do you suppose Irma even knows the names of her own servants? Do you? I'm not sure she knows the names of her own children, for all she sees of them."

"Now, Rudolph," said Mrs. Clove, lifting a chubby hand in protest.

"You don't believe it? Doris coughed all last night. Do you think Irma has even heard about it? She is n't a mother. She is n't a wife. She is n't a housekeeper. What does she do? She amuses herself. That is all she thinks of from morning to night, and that is all any of them think of! Well, I'm going to come to some decision."

Mrs. Clove saw that he had no intention of being specific.

"I will speak to Irma," she said, in a tone of decision, wondering if her daughter had given him any real cause for jealousy. "Poor dear, she is dreadfully upset!"

"She should be."

"But has anything happened — anything special?"

"What! Don't you think that is enough?"

"My dear Rudolph, of course I do!" she said hastily, starting for the door. "I will talk at once with Irma. She certainly should pay more attention to the children. You should ask more of her. You should insist! But, then — you said it yourself — it's the life of the younger generation."

"Well, I've made up my mind," said Mr. Della-barre rapidly, "and I'm going to make a decision."

Mrs. Clove knew her daughter and her inherent appetite for admiration, but she judged her incapable of going further than a light flirtation, because she

understood the modern coquette's need of multiplicity in her adorers.

"Well?" said Irma, without looking up from a Russian novel.

"He's very excitable."

"I see I shall have to go down," said Irma, who perceived that her mother had learned nothing. She rose. "It is really too humiliating. Kitty Lightbody is here, and will tell it all over New York. I must bring it to a head—a violent scene, that's the only way," she concluded, rearranging her hair in the mirror.

"But you must have a suspicion?"

"Of whom he is jealous? My dear mother, it might be any one of twenty men. No one could be more careful than I. Just look how people talk about Kitty and Gladys Challoner. But a lot of good it does me. If I gave him any reason—" She paused, and the need of preparing her attitude caused her to feel a little real indignation, as she continued: "Do you think my life is an easy one? Do you think it isn't humiliating to have your husband fuddled every night regularly at six o'clock? Do I reproach him? Do I make scenes when he sits at the dinner table staring at his place and has to be helped into the library?" She shrugged her shoulders, glanced at the mirror, rectified the line of her negligee and tripped down to the library.

"My dear Rudolph, we must come somewhere," she said quietly, "otherwise, I am determined to countermand the dinner and make my excuses to Kitty and the boys. What exactly and precisely do you reproach me with this time?"

Mr. Dellabarre came to a full stop opposite his wife. About her husband there seemed to be always an impassable iron grating which recalled to her that feeling of terror she had experienced when, in her days of poverty, she had faced the dread figure of the cashier.

"You know very well," he said suddenly.

"I know what you have been saying to me all morning and what you've been repeating to mother. Is that all?"

"All!" exclaimed Mr. Dellabarre, who, fired anew, repeated again his theories about the upbringing of the modern woman. Mrs. Dellabarre arranged herself patiently in an armchair and waited until the subject should have exhausted itself. At the end of ten minutes, she rose and rang for Miss Bane.

"Miss Bane, kindly call up Mrs. Challoner, the Brackens, and the Ponsivals. Inform them that I am obliged to countermand the dinner to-night. Say that we are afraid Doris has the measles. Mr. Dellabarre thinks it unwise to expose others. That is all."

Miss Bane, who knew enough to wait further confirmation, withdrew.

"Now, my dear, every one will know that we have been quarreling," she said quietly. To her surprise, her husband did not flinch, despite the horror she knew he had of public gossip. She determined, therefore, to force the issue.

"My dear Rudolph, you may save yourself the pains. I know all this by memory. Your description of me is exact. I am a modern wife, if you will, the wife of a rich man. I don't cook; I don't darn the children's socks; I don't haggle over the butcher's bill or the price of eggs. All this is true. But why did you marry me?"

As she intended, this threw him into such a state of fury that he blurted out what most husbands suspect but which they do well not to reveal in the first years of matrimonial discussion.

"Marry you?" he cried. "You know very well I married you because you wanted me to."

She saw the sudden flare-up of jealousy in the strange shut-in nature of the man who still loved her. She had a moment of pity, for she had a kind heart and often returned to those good resolutions she had formed at the altar, when she had passed from the shadow of scheming and privation into the new world of gratification and power. But immediately angered by the justice of his remark, she rang imperiously and gave orders to pack her trunk on the instant.

"That is going too far," she said coldly. "You are quite sober, and you know what you are saying. I shall leave here at once, and shall stay away until you come to your senses. The situation is intolerable."

"It is intolerable," he said, and the hand which he held rigidly before him began to shake, as she had never seen it do before. "I quite agree with you — you had better go and come to *your* senses!"

"What! He is going to let me go without a word of protest," she thought, frightened for the first time in his presence. She had an uneasy feeling that what she was facing was not a spasmodic outburst but a definite rebellion. She turned and came back.

"I won't discuss your last insult. You are, at least, a gentleman, and you will realize yourself the indelicacy of such a remark. Now, my dear Rudolph, if you really wished the kind of fireside paragon that you describe, you could easily have had one. There are thousands of them. If you did n't, it is because

you wanted just what you have got, a wife of whom you could be proud, a wife to give you a brilliant home, whom you would carry off from other men, a wife who would bring you youth and charm — a wife, in a word, to decorate your house. So much for that. Whatever else you can accuse me of, I have never compromised the dignity of your name. My name has never been handed about, as some other wives we know. I've taken the greatest care that if men paid me attention — and you'd be the first to regret it if they did n't — that no special one should ever be distinguished. This, however, you don't appreciate."

In hearing her speak thus, with all the charm and grace which she knew how to convey to her words, it seemed to him that he was utterly wrong. He stammered out:

"What do I care about that? You can have a hundred men about you."

"Which means it's only *one* person you object to," said Irma instantly. "In other words, all these diatribes are just subterfuges. You are afraid to say what you think, because you know that it will sound ridiculous. You are jealous again of some one man." He looked at her and then down at the floor. "Well, who is it?" she asked triumphantly, feeling that she had regained her old supremacy.

"You know very well."

She knew, but to name him would give the appearance of confession. At the bottom, she knew what he himself did not realize — that the trouble lay deeper, in the impossibility of simulating the love he craved.

"I have not the slightest idea," she said quietly, because in her certainty of victory she always felt a

little compassion, and because she was impatient to end this scene which interfered with her projects of the evening. "Well, who is it this time? Is it Tody Dawson or Jap Laracy? Nothing would surprise me. It once was Mr. Challoner — Are you still jealous of him — or Dwight Harcourt or Steve Lewis?"

"No; it's not!" Suddenly he turned and, fixing her with his weak eyes that all at once gathered points of anger, he cried, "I won't have you talked about with Monte Bracken."

"Monte! My dear Rudy, you are insane!" she exclaimed, in excellent bewilderment. "A man I have n't seen for years until last month, whom I have met perhaps six times. No, that's too absurd!"

"Exactly, Monte Bracken!" he said, coming close to her, his face disfigured with jealousy. "The rest I don't care about. But Bracken I bar. The rest are nothing to you, but Bracken you cared for, and he cared for you." All at once his hand, which was trembling with emotion, closed over her arm, and she felt the sharp pinch of his fingers. "Do you understand now? — I forbid your coupling your name with Monte Bracken's. I forbid it!"

He had never before laid his hand on her. It was the first time she had seen him completely given over to his passion. Despite herself, she felt her face go red as though, before this revelation of her husband, she had experienced a sudden guilt.

A knock broke in on the tension of their attitudes. She drew away hastily.

"Well, who is it?" said Mr. Dellabarre, his voice still on the pitch of excitement.

"Miss Bane, sir."

He glanced at his wife nervously, fingered the but-

tons of his coat, drew a long breath, and said impatiently,

"Well, why don't you come in, then?"

The door opened half-way.

"Please, Madame, Mr. and Mrs. Forrester have just arrived — what shall I do?"

Mr. Dellabarre scowled, hesitated and looked to his wife, in utter perplexity.

"There is only one thing to do," she said quietly, seizing the providential opportunity. "Mr. Dellabarre will go down and explain about Doris. You will have to send them away somehow."

"No, no — we can't do that," said Mr. Dellabarre hastily, shrinking at the thought, for once his anger had shot up, it quickly subsided. "Wait a moment, Miss Bane — wait a moment, wait a moment outside. It's annoying, very annoying, but we can't send them away."

He began to walk up and down the room in his stiff perpendicular way, while Irma watched him from the corner of her eye. To her, it was a revelation. What he had done in an access of jealousy she forgave, as all women forgive such tributes. In the emptiness of her own sentimental experience, it even gave her a thrill to realize that the man who disposed of her could love her to the point of doing her harm.

"All the same, he looked at me as though he wanted to kill me," she said, staring at him.

All at once he turned,

"Well, now what's to be done, Irma?" he said petulantly, looking to her for assistance. He hesitated a moment. "You know we can't send them away. That is not possible. That is n't done!"

"No; that is n't done, and other things are n't done, either," she said sternly.

He fidgeted back and forth, seeking some compromise, and finding it difficult.

"Are n't you ashamed of yourself?" she said, shaking her head and smiling.

"Please treat as serious what I've said," he said sullenly, his glance traveling along the carpet. "I know very well I can't make you love me. You never have. Put that aside—yes, put that aside. You can go your way—up to a certain point—but be careful, Irma, be very careful."

For a moment his eyes rose to hers, and the sudden leap of suffering and passion she saw there brought her for the first time in her easy, superficial existence, a real emotion—a fear—a genuine fear of her husband.

VI

MEANWHILE Mrs. Lightbody with the boys, in company with the two Miss Teakes who had returned with them for tea, were amusing themselves in the great baronial sitting room during the continued absence of their hostess.

"What can we do?" said Mrs. Lightbody, a plump, rolling blond of resolute youthfulness, who was in constant state of anxiety before the pursuing problem of being amused. "Let's cut in for a hand of bridge."

"No, Kitty, dear," said Tody Dawson impertinently; "I will dance with you, I will amuse you in any other way, but I will not play bridge with you — you are entirely too expensive — and I need the money."

Laracy, who was at the piano, rattling up and down the keys, emerged from behind the keyboard: a podgy, placid, smiling, flat-faced figure, affecting tight check trousers, glowing socks, and fancy waistcoats.

"Did Kitty propose bridge again?" he said, with equal impertinence, referring to some disaster of the night before. "She should be stood in a corner."

"You funny, odd boy! You know I don't play half badly now."

"Not half badly, entirely so," said Laracy. "Well, Tody, if we've got to amuse her, better to keep her dancing."

"Yes, that keeps her out of breath," said Dawson, getting up with the air of a martyr. He was a sky-scraping type of youth, with long face and rising

yellow hair which, after four years of college education, flowed back without a flurry from the untroubled calm of his well-pleased expression — a beau ideal of that tailorable figure which advertising artists depict in heroic postures, resting on tennis rackets or golf sticks.

“How about thumb-wrestling?”

“Oh, I dote on that!” said Mrs. Lightbody, clapping her hands and, turning to the colorless and impassive Miss Teakes, she explained, in excited phrases, the principles of this latest parlor trick. “My dear, he’s simply wonderful; he can wrestle you with one hand and me with another, *blindfolded*, and beat us both. It’s excruciatingly funny.”

“T. Y. K.,” said Dawson, bowing, and meaning, in the abbreviating trick of the day, “Thanking you kindly.”

“Saying which, Lord Ronald inclined his noble brow and suffered his beautiful violet eyes to be bandaged,” said Laracy, drawing forth a red-and-yellow handkerchief amid the titters of an appreciative audience.

Dawson and Laracy belonged to that new variety of household pet which supplements the absence of hard-worked husbands in society. A woman of fashion counts from two to ten of the variety in her train, who fetch and carry, run small errands, adore her in a public, harmless way, accompany her to the theater or opera, surround her at *thé dansants* and invent a hundred amusing tricks to save her from the necessity of reading and other forms of boredom. Wise in their generation, they seldom make blunders, knowing that they are admitted to intimacy only on the basis of absolute docility, and acquiring the knowl-

edge of worldly values, they wait patiently under such patronage the opportunities of what is called a successful marriage. Dawson and Laracy were unusually gifted. They played in masterly fashion all games of chance where a friendly dollar could be sought. They formed a team, which imitated the latest comic-opera favorites. They spoke a jargon of their own. They danced like professional dancers, with really the most remarkable agility, and, from morning to night, kept up a running patter of story, anecdote, repartee, and picturesque slang which made easy the task of the most desperate hostess.

About five o'clock, the older men began to return from polo practice. Tea at the Dellabarre's was an institution in Chilton society, which, like many similar societies, was formed on feudal lines, congregating around one or two established families, with their castles, their retainers, and their adherents who, by some mystery of hidden economy, attached themselves to the leaders, imitated their luxuries, and scrambled desperately to marry their children advantageously before the impending day of accounting arrived.

By the time the Forresters had unpacked and descended, the great living room had filled up with casual guests, a few of the men in riding breeches, the women in gaily-colored sweaters and striped skirts. From the landing of the winding stair, Amy looked down on the great vaulted room, paneled in brown, with pleasant regions of shadows and lights, and, at the end, a great fireplace with lighted logs. A group was gathered about a card table, another about the shiny decanters, while Tody Dawson, thin and active, was pirouetting, his arms lightly in the air, exaggerating the bend of his shoulders as he turned in saucers. A

group watched this demonstration of the newest step with the solemnity of a religious contemplation. Somewhere in the obscurity of the deep baronial living room, Laracy was pounding out the rhythmic measure with youthful enthusiasm. The music ended with a crash, and at the charming appearance of Amy at the balustrade, there was a sudden hush of curiosity.

What the young d'Artagnan experienced at his first introduction into the brilliant court of the Hotel de Tréville, Amy Forrester felt at this sudden silence which was like the rolling-up of a curtain. The new world to conquer, her world, lay below. She felt a quickening of all her instincts, transforming her into a different and public self. At the same moment, she realized that she was no longer alone but an integral part of the man who followed at her back. Andrew, too, was about to be judged, and by a judgment without the slightest mercy, that accepted only what it could not destroy. The thought of her husband threw her into a sudden timidity, and this involuntary modesty not only was becoming to her but conciliated the good will of her hostess.

In a group of men, who were gathered, glass in hand, at a serving table, Mrs. Dellabarre was standing with her hand drawn through her husband's arm, in that punctilious public advertisement of her marital felicity which she never neglected and which she used as a whip over the heads of her admirers, as a sort of warning of the limitations she imposed on their adoration. She had slipped into a dark skirt and purple sweater, drawn her hair tightly back, contriving to make herself both ugly and distinguished, despite the sudden looming prominence of her aquiline nose. Gladys Challoner, her dearest rival, had said of her:

"When Irma gets herself up like a fright before dinner, she is preparing to dazzle you after."

As she went to meet the Forresters, by the indefinable subtleties with which one woman rates another, Mrs. Dellabarre saw that Amy was of her world. She was attracted to her instantly, as one woman is attracted to another, with the pleasure of encountering an antagonist worthy to be destroyed.

"We have met before," she said smiling, with a little extra pressure of her hand, "but we are all anxious to meet the man who could carry off the favorite after her first season," she added, extending her hand to Mr. Forrester. "It's rare enough to make you quite a hero."

"How do you do, Mrs. Dellabarre," he said, in his strong, pleasant bass, stepping forward with eagerness in his eyes.

If she had been agreeably surprised with Amy, she was quite unprepared for the strong attraction which Andrew Forrester exercised over her from the moment of their first handclasp. Like all neurasthenic natures, she responded instantly to the buoyant health of a dominant vitality. So quick was this pleasant sense of well-being that the easy phrase of welcome passed completely out of her mind, and only the mechanical approach of her husband prevented her showing too plainly her perplexity.

Amy had a confused sense of catching names that meant nothing to her, of seeing so many human manikins grouped about her — Mrs. Lightbody's glance set in criticism, a glance that swept her from head to foot, seeking the weak point; an elderly beau offered a glib compliment, and she was conscious of murmuring something in answer. Mrs. Dellabarre,

after a graceful introduction, returned to the men, abandoning Amy to the group whose conversation she had interrupted. One of the Miss Teakes, in brilliant sweater and striped skirt, took up in a loud voice, without further attention to the new arrival, a discussion of the polo match, seaming her comments with the slang of the stables. Three men, without addressing a word to her, finding Amy young and attractive, stared at her with open admiration. Fortunately, at this moment, from the piano a beaming waistcoat and glowing smile bore down on her.

"Welcome to our city!" exclaimed Laracy. "This is a surprise. Have I got to behave, Amy, and call you 'Mrs. Forrester'?"

"Get me away from here," she said, shaking hands and laughing.

"Freezing by the fireside, eh?" said Jap Laracy, with a glance at the group. "Pretty northwest, eh? Irma engages me to thaw them out, but it's tough — it's tough! My eyes and whiskers, Amy, I'm glad to see you! Have you seen Tody?"

"Not yet," she said, with a little confusion, for Tody Dawson had been her most devoted admirer and, in her youthful imagination, she reproached herself a little at the havoc she felt she had created.

"Oh, he's pining, pining away, cruel maiden!" said Laracy. "So are we all. How could you go and do it? Here's the wreck now."

Dawson, in perfect health, without a line on his face or a ripple on the perfect edge of his trousers, came up, serene and unembarrassed.

"Well, Amy, no use in pretending. Every one knows you've blighted my young existence. My heart's shot to pieces, but I forgive you."

He rattled this off with light impertinence, tucking a lavender handkerchief up his sleeve — a new accomplishment. A year had transformed the young cub just out of college, who used to blush and stammer in the face of his youthful adoration. Amy looked up at him, marveling at the change.

"I think you'll recover," she said, smiling.

In a moment, they were laughing over old escapades, unconscious as three children.

"What are you three having such a good time about?" said Mrs. Lightbody, approaching jealously. She laid a plump hand on Dawson's arm in an affectionate pressure. "Tody, darling, I must get that step before to-night. Jap, be a dear and play for us again."

"My dear Kitty," said Dawson coolly, "be calm — be calm — and have n't I told you never to show jealousy when I am paying attention to a pretty woman?"

Amy listened in astonishment while Mrs. Lightbody, vastly amused at this style of wit, laughed outright.

"You funny boy. Mrs. —" She hesitated, seeking the name.

"Mrs. Kezzizzas," said Laracy solemnly.

Mrs. Lightbody bit her lip but, determined, she appealed to Amy.

"You don't mind, do you?"

"Say you do," said Dawson. "We are trying to bring Kitty up properly. She has the most shocking manners."

"Am I rude?" said Mrs. Lightbody, rolling her eyes.

"Oh, no — I am the intruder here," said Mrs. Forrester quietly.

Mrs. Lightbody, having contrived to isolate her (though without malice, for her bad manners were natural), carried Dawson off in triumph. Amy remained with her back to the group by the fireplace, uncomfortable and angry, somewhat consoled by the spectacle of Mrs. Lightbody's floundering efforts. She took a cup of tea from the butler who came up, and stood watching the swaying figures. A group formed about the surface of light, the men curious, the women solemn, confronted with a new responsibility, while those whose figures inclined to plumpness studied the effect of Mrs. Lightbody's movements with personal solicitude.

"So that's what they've made of the tango!" said a voice at her shoulder — a modulated voice, curiously flexible and soft. "What contortions!"

"Why, I think he dances very well."

"Dawson? Of course. His trained legs are irreproachable. But it's not the tango. I've danced it in the Argentine and in Spain, and I know. It is n't the movement at all. The real tango is stately — danced with dignity."

"But that's the way we were taught." She turned and all at once perceived that she had been talking to a stranger. At the same moment, he perceived his mistake.

"I beg your pardon, I thought —"

"So did I," she said, smiling. Then perceiving how intimate had been their comprehension of the unfinished thought, she blushed.

"After all," he said easily, "there is no great harm done. If you are a very punctilious person, I'll have Mrs. Dellabarre present me."

Instinctively she divined who he was, by the ease of

his manner and the foreign deference of his attitude. He was still in riding clothes of brown, which harmonized with the rather Spanish tan of his face and set off the slight but alert figure, a man well groomed, well ordered, assured and natural, pleasing to the eye and ear.

"You are not Montgomery Bracken by any chance?" she said impulsively.

"Yes. How did you —"

"I don't know. I guessed it." Then realizing how strange this must sound, she blushed again. To cover her embarrassment, she said rapidly, "My cousin, Miss Nordstrum, has described you to me." Then remembering Fifi's declared intention, she laughed.

He read the amusement in her eyes rightly.

"Is my scalp in danger?" he said. "Fifi is a very determined young lady. Then you are Mrs. Forrester, of course. Is your husband here? Won't you present me?"

Before she could act on the tactful suggestion which relieved the embarrassment of the situation, Dawson was back at her side, begging her to dance with him.

"Come on, Amy, now. Let's give them a professional exhibition. Kitty is gasping for breath. Hello, Monte!"

"How are you, Dawson?"

She hesitated, watching Bracken with a little amused malice, divining his impatience, at the assurance of the new generation. Tody had her by the hand, dragging her toward the open floor, with that muscular enthusiasm which has replaced man's deference to woman in modern ballrooms. To refuse was awkward, and, besides, she had a score to settle with Mrs. Lightbody.

"Here's how it's done!" announced Dawson, with the disdain of a virtuoso.

She danced instinctively, pliant to her partner, so light that her flitting steps seemed noiseless, with a harmony of poise and movement that charmed the eye, the delight a beautiful child awakens in its graceful passing. The tango at that time was still a curiosity, and the deft exhibition they gave was watched by every one. She saw the crowding curiosity through half-closed eyes, from Mrs. Lightbody's staring tribute to the spreading pride on her husband's face. Bracken was by his side, studying her with a grateful smile. She knew that she pleased him and was pleased herself at the thought. They ended amid a clapping of hands and, flushed with pleasure and excitement, she hastened to present Tody to her husband.

"How do, Mr. Forrester," said that self-sufficient youngster. "I shake hands, but I really ought to knife you for carrying off Amy."

"Ah — were you interested?" said Forrester, surveying him.

"I?" said Dawson, flushing. "Why, didn't you know I organized the society of the mitten?"

"Indeed?" said Forrester, in his deep bass, looking at the product of the modern generation as a mastiff endures the antics of a lap dog.

Dawson's soda-water wit bubbled out completely. He stood shifting from foot to foot, seeking a chance to escape. Bracken took pity on him.

"I acknowledge the superiority of your legs, Dawson," he said, with a shade of sarcasm, "but dance the tango as it really is danced."

"I say, do you know it?" said Dawson eagerly, as though before a great discovery. "By George, I wish you'd show us."

"Very glad to, if Mrs. Forrester will give me her assistance." He turned to Andrew. "That won't be asking too much of your wife, will it?"

Forrester gave the implied permission with a nod of his head. Bracken passed to the piano, where he indicated a slower rhythm and certain definite accents, and returning, bowed to his partner.

"Will you do me the honor to dance it with me, Mrs. Forrester? There are certain steps you'll pick up at once. We'll dance it with very little movement of the body, slow, rather languid, quite stately."

He waited until she gave her hand, before offering his arm, with a deference that gave it the value of a rare favor, and in this tactful attitude, so different from the catch-as-catch-can license of the American ballroom, he made her feel a new preciousness of herself. In a few moments, they were dancing in unison, in graceful, undulating rhythm. He held her well apart from him, guiding her only with a slight pressure of the left hand, yet she was aware of his nearness. And, as she danced, she felt gloriously, triumphantly young. The brown vaulted hall and the staring strangers swam away. She was floating somewhere between earth and sky, content to surrender all her will to the touch that led her through dreamy regions of melodious rhythms, fairy lights and perfumed flowers.

"What is so dangerous about him?" she thought, wondering why Fifi had seen fit to warn her.

He paid her no compliment, except for an occasional nod of satisfaction, but in the gentleness of his voice, in the slight smile with which he watched her moving rhythmically about him, she knew he, too, had the same sense of spontaneous congeniality.

"I am sorry we have to stop," he said at last, with a sigh of regret.

"I, too," she answered, in the same tone.

They looked at each other a short moment and smiled with pleasure. Then they returned to the others and the general conversation. She knew that she would see him again soon. She looked forward eagerly to the moment when he would really talk to her, sure that they would find instant sympathy. Yet the agreeable impression he had thrown about her was so impersonal that, in their rooms, dressing for dinner, she said to Andrew:

"Oh, I like Mr. Bracken. He seems really worth while."

"Bracken is a real man," said Andrew heartily.

"Which means that some of the others are n't," she said, laughing. "Poor Tody and Jap!"

"I don't think I understand that specimen," he said gruffly. "Why don't they put them in ruffles?"

She came up to him vastly amused, twitching his ear.

"Gracious, you must n't be so fierce! They're harmless."

"Perhaps."

"Are you bored?"

"I? No."

"Truthfully?"

"Of course."

But he did not voice his real sentiments. It had been a great readjustment, and his pride had suffered. For the first time he had felt lost, dwarfed and inconsequential. The shock had awakened all his ambition, setting in train dangerous desires for power and prestige, to force the recognition he craved — to be

some one in this society where he was rated lower than the youngest cub with his bag of tricks to amuse. And this awakening appetite was destined to change the whole course of his life.

VII

A FEW minutes before dinner, Mrs. Dellabarre found occasion to say to Monte Bracken:

"I am putting you beside little Mrs. Forrester. There are reasons why I want you to be, well — extra attentive to her."

"Special reasons?" said Bracken, smiling, for Irma's mental processes were a source of delight to him, and he saw in the request a ruse to give the appearance of a duty to what was already an inclination.

Mrs. Dellabarre's glance passed down the hall to where the mechanical figure of her husband was superintending the distribution of the cocktails and remained on it a noticeable moment.

"You are too quick, Monte, to need embarrassing explanations," she said significantly. "So make a point of it — only don't get really interested."

"She is quite striking in her way."

"If she were two inches taller, she would be a great beauty," she answered thoughtfully, putting her finger on the only criticism that might hold.

"Then I am not to sit next to you?" he said, with an admiring glance at her striking and harmonious *toilette*. With Irma he was never bored and never convinced.

"It's better not," she said slowly.

He was the man to whom she held. She held to

him as she held to her youth. She looked about uneasily, longing to prolong the conversation. Rudolph's eyes from under his bushy eyebrows were on her, and there was something in the new rigidity of his look, something so vaguely disquieting, that she felt a little shudder run over her shoulders. "Some one walking over my grave," she thought and, frowning, she turned away.

Amy went in on the arm of Mr. Dellabarre, who showed her to her seat with a dignity which he assumed with the same care with which he calculated the descending steps and rounded the obstacles of the chairs.

"I hope you are enjoying yourself here," he said, in spaced solemnity, with a fugitive, indifferent look in the pale eyes which had become a little watery. Then he drew back into his shell, always uncomfortable in the presence of new acquaintances, particularly of the opposite sex.

In ten years, he had not added a friendship. The butler, having watched him into his seat, saw that his glass did not remain long empty. The scene with his wife had upset his routine, for in his inebriety there was no disorder — total abstinence until six o'clock, a certain number of cocktails, an invariable pint of champagne and later the regular measure of old preserve Scotch. But to-night he had gone a little beyond his schedule, and he sat waiting for the dinner to begin, staring painfully at a silver dish on the glowing tablecloth in front of him.

Mrs. Forrester, thus abandoned, waited with eagerness the moment when Monte Bracken would turn to her. Though the patter, based on intimate details, was foreign to her, and the white fronts of the men

'loomed with the rigidity of social tombstones, she felt like an exile returning into her own. The men were mostly of the riding set, in excellent humor due to proper preparation, ready to be fed and talked to. The women were electrically pretty, in flashing colors, daring in the *décolleté* which that season had broken down all prejudices. Opposite her was the beautiful Mrs. Challoner, cold and statuesque, flawless in feature and complexion, careless of the public announcement of her dimpled shoulders and the white fall of her throat. She remembered with some amusement Andrew's preconceived ideas. He was beside Mrs. Dellabarre, and she thought, as she caught his expression, that he was rather consciously examining his plate. Irma Dellabarre was not as copiously revealed as Mrs. Challoner, and yet she gave the impression of being more so, in a deep purple velvet dress that hid one shoulder and gave to the other the malicious appearance of an accident. Her hair was built high above her forehead and fell about it in softening clusters. She wore one stone against her throat—a point of white fire against the dark throat.

"She looks like a portrait," Amy said, turning to Mr. Bracken.

"Irma always paints a portrait."

But one of the Miss Teakes, determined not to let him go, recalled him with a question. Amy waited. In the glance he had given her, she had felt the divining instinct of the man. He affected her with a strange sense of intimacy. Without the need of effort, in the first pleased meeting of their eyes, she felt he comprehended her, her varying moods and contrary impulses, her bewilderment before unchartered experiences, all the good and bad which lay undisciplined

within her, and to comprehend this without criticism in his comprehension of many women.

Yet when, at length, he turned to her, she experienced a sudden embarrassment, that first unease which two persons instinctively drawn to each other often experience in sweeping away the opening formalities.

"How stupid I am—I am boring him," she thought, in the first moments of manufactured conversation.

All at once she saw that he was watching her with critical amusement. She began to laugh.

"How do you know what amuses me?" he asked.

"I do. You were admiring my social manner."

"Right. It is terrifically impressive."

"Then let's break the ice and really talk," she said eagerly.

"What! Say what we really think? But that's unheard of! Such a thing is not permitted in good society."

"Please."

"The responsibility be on your head," he said gravely. "But why do you want to put me to such a test?"

"If I told you, it would sound very flat," she said, smiling at him.

In the easy distinction of his evening clothes, he pleased her eye, always sensitive to harmonies of line and color.

They looked at each other uncertainly, each impulsively attracted, and their glances seemed to run ahead of their thoughts, in mute interrogation and answer.

"Of course, there is only one thing that's interesting—ourselves," he said, with a mischievous upward

turn of his lips which were unusually sensitive for a man.

She considered this in some doubt. It was of course the only subject she longed to discuss, but she wondered if this was but the prelude to a conventional flirtation.

"Well, begin."

"Would you do it over again?" he said, with an assumption of magisterial solemnity which robbed the question of half its astounding impertinence.

"Why, Mr. Bracken!" she exclaimed, taken utterly off her guard, which was what he wished.

"Dear me, is not that the most natural question in the world?" he said, lifting his eyebrows. "Walking through the social jungle, I meet a young lady who has the appearance of having eloped from boarding school, a young lady who commands me to halt and say what I think. Thereupon, I look at her and, wondering many things, I ask a direct question. Of course, if you wish to go back —"

"Heaven forbid!" she said hastily. She looked at him with a quizzical smile, which brought her eyebrows into their odd angle and suddenly determined to give him as good as he sent, said,

"Question for question?"

"Agreed."

"If you had to make up *your* mind again" — she glanced over again to where Irma was sitting — "would *you* do the same thing?"

He laughed without embarrassment.

"Your question is more impertinent than mine," he said, without pretense of misunderstanding. "And some one has been gossiping."

"Then you admit yours was, too," she said, with a satisfied nod. "Well, sir?"

"I perceive you are in love with your husband," he said evasively.

She saw that he intended to treat her as a child and, adopting his tone of banter, replied:

"You see, I am still a bride. Now the secret is out. I am quite hopeless. Why such a serious look? Pitying me?"

He shook his head.

"Or perhaps my husband?"

"Perhaps the husband," he said slowly, looking at her more attentively.

"Really, this is the most extraordinary conversation!" she cried. "Are you making fun of me, or do you always shock people to break the ice?"

"Who changed the conversation?"

She looked down at the table, running her fingers among the assembled forks, quite eager to hear more, wondering how far he understood her, afraid lest he might perceive too much and yet not certain of either his seriousness or his bantering attitude.

"You know, I believe you mean it."

"But I do! The cards, my dear lady, are stacked against him. You can no more escape your destiny than the moth the flame."

"Are you going to prophesy?" she said, with one of those fugitive looks with which only very young or very innocent women give the impression of retreating into an inner shelter.

"Shall I?"

She hesitated, and again the feeling came over her that she had experienced in their first meeting — that this man who had known many women knew her instinctively. She was not sure that she wanted her own forebodings to be reawakened.

"Perhaps later," she said, glancing about to see if Miss Teake was eavesdropping. "It would be rather difficult now, would n't it? You see, I am already frightened."

"Shall we return to sterilized conversation then?"

"Anything but that! Tell me who these people are."

"Who interests you?"

"Mrs. Bracken. Your sister-in-law, is n't she?" she said instantly, glancing across the table at the woman who had attracted her from the first.

"Really?" he said appreciatively. "I should have thought the beautiful Mrs. Challoner —"

"No, no — plaster of Paris," she said maliciously.

"Beware! She'll become a bosom friend."

"Tell me about your sister-in-law."

"Claire?" he said, and the raillery went out of his voice. "There are not two like her in the world!"

"I believe it," she said pensively. "I have never seen such kind eyes."

For a moment they were silent, studying her. Among this courtesan stripping and license of attitude and speech, Mrs. Bracken remained the gentlewoman. Her gown of russet silk interpreted but did not reveal. The light ashen hair flowed without artifice about the clear temples. On her neck she wore a single emerald pendant in an old Renaissance setting. Yet she stood out from all the rest by the distinction of her bearing, her poise, the cultured modulation of her voice, and the graciousness of her expression, which lay in the serenity of her eyes, the serenity of one who still retains the child's faith in the good of the world or perhaps has come to charity through some suffering, nobly endured.

At this moment, as though aware of their interest, Mrs. Bracken turned and, their eyes meeting, Amy smiled impulsively and shyly. She looked a moment surprised, divined that she was being discussed, and responded by a little friendly nod of her head.

"Allan, my brother, is beside Mrs. Challoner," he said, indicating a young fellow, who was laughing boyishly in a serio-comic attitude of flattery. One of the best young scamps in the world — irresponsible as a kitten, lovable as you make them, without a spot of malice in him, and always in trouble up to his ears, despite the best of intentions."

"Would that describe you a little?"

"In the past, perhaps. We're of the same stock," he said lightly.

"I wonder if they are happy together?" she asked impulsively.

"Claire has made everything of him," he continued. "He might have ended in the gutter. Instead, he has become a useful citizen. He adores his home, his children. He is interested in a dozen activities, and he has discovered that he has a mind. He is fortunate."

"Does he know it?"

"He knows it," he said emphatically.

"You have a very high opinion of her?" she said, looking at him.

"Yes, very."

The feeling which he had shown surprised her — had there been more than just this reverence, she wondered?

"I didn't expect you to take this view of life," she said, still in her reverie.

"It's rather too intimate," he said, and returned

to the lightness of his first manner. "Shall we gossip?"

"Don't," she said impulsively. "I like you better this way."

VIII

WHEN they left the men for the parlor, the *mauvais quart d'heure* which Amy had feared began. Mrs. Dellabarre, not yet decided to accept such a formidable rival, turned her over to the mercy of the others. Amy, after a moment of hesitation, drew up her chair beside Mrs. Challoner and Mrs. Lightbody.

"Mrs. Challoner, I have been admiring you all through dinner," she began timidly. "I have never seen anything so darling as your gown."

"This rag? Oh, really! I was about to throw it away," said Mrs. Challoner, favoring her with a stare and, turning to Mrs. Lightbody, she added, "I'm done with Prandish. The line he gives you this year is something abominable."

"Gracious, Gladys, I should say so! There really is only one place in New York," said Mrs. Lightbody, without deeming it necessary to specify such common knowledge.

"And who is that?" said Amy, and, determined to be agreeable, she moved her chair around Mrs. Challoner's half-averted shoulder.

"Why, Franceline, of course!"

Both ladies turned in astonishment, while their glances traveled over her gown, which, though sufficiently expensive, was not from Franceline.

"Rudy was certainly leaning hard on his fork to-night," said Mrs. Lightbody, in a confidential whis-

per, which was her slangy way of describing his familiar condition.

"Poor Irma, he does hang on!" said Mrs. Challoner.

"They had another row this morning."

"About whom?" said Mrs. Challoner, interested.

"Monte, of course."

"I don't see how she stands it. I should n't blame her for anything."

"What's Jack doing?" said Mrs. Lightbody, inquiring of the husband.

"How do I know?" said Mrs. Challoner amiably.

"I say, Gladys, everything's poky around here," said Mrs. Lightbody, "what do you say to getting up a party for to-morrow? I can 'phone."

All at once, as though aware of an eavesdropper, she stopped and looked at Amy, who, unable to utter a word, had sat rigidly, completely isolated.

"What do they expect me to do?" she thought angrily. "Get up and move away?"

"We'll talk it over later," said Mrs. Challoner significantly.

At the moment when this public snubbing had become evident to every one, Mrs. Bracken rose and, approaching them, held out her hand to Amy, saying:

"Come over and talk to me a little. I want to really know you." This unexpected overture changed on the instant the attitude of all toward Mrs. Forrester. Mrs. Bracken came of a family which for five generations had never deviated from its ideals, producing men of distinction and women educated to be helpmates and mothers, whose conduct did not vary with the wind of fashion but rested on the rock of self-respect — one of those families, the true moral

aristocrats of America, who continue steadfast in their traditions, despite the torrential spread of a new polyglot society. She had the reputation of being difficult in her friendship and implacable in her judgments, but the entrée to her house was a passport everywhere. "Here is a quiet corner," she said, and, still holding Amy's hand, she drew her to a window seat removed from the general conversation. "What a child you are! But you held your ground beautifully!"

Amy's eyes filled with tears at the gentleness of her tone. She looked at her, and it seemed to her, as she met the clear, untroubled eyes, that she could have opened her heart to her on the instant. Mrs. Bracken perceived the emotion she had caused and gave her a little pressure of the hand.

"There, my dear. They are cats, but it is a tribute, you know."

Amy hardly heard what was said. She was gazing at her, carried away by an impulse she did not comprehend.

"I wish I could be your friend," she said abruptly.

"Perhaps you will be."

"I feel that I could talk to you about anything," she said quickly, "but I know to be your friend is a great privilege."

"Yes; I don't give my friendship easily, but I believe I could be a friend to you — a real friend."

They looked at each other for a moment, surprised at the abruptness of their liking, yet knowing that their sympathy was mutual.

"Oh, please, I wish you would, Mrs. Bracken; it would mean so much to me!"

"Then that's decided," she answered, with a smile. "This is not the place for a serious conversation, but

some day we 'll have one — if you wish it. Now tell me a little about yourself."

When, later, the men came in, Allan and Monte Bracken joined them, visibly surprised at the cordiality of their attitude.

"Well, that is a compliment," said Monte Bracken when, the dancing having begun, they installed themselves in the conservatory for a breathing spell. "I never saw Claire go to any one like that before."

"She took pity on me."

Bracken looked amused.

"The ladies were showing their claws, eh?"

"And I felt them!"

"You won't be let in without a fight, you know."

"I don't know whether I want to," she said pensively. "Is it worth it? Tell me about your sister-in-law. She must be a very happy person."

He picked a sprig of ivy from a near-by bower, nodded and said solemnly,

"Very — very happy!"

"I wish I were like her," she said impulsively.

He smiled.

"Worried about my prophecy?"

She looked at him and then, drawing back into her chair, half covered her face with her fan, so that her blue eyes looked over at him, big and round and a little apprehensive.

"Go on."

"You defy the oracle?"

She nodded.

"Why are the cards stacked against my husband?"

The situation amused him, nor was it new. He looked at her with a slanted, quizzical glance and began slowly, with a mixture of impertinence and light

good humor with which he knew how to make acceptable the most personal disquisition.

"Because you are destined to become a professionally beautiful woman, like Mrs. Challoner over there." He nodded toward the dancers, who flashed across the doorway and, with an assumption of impersonality, continued: "If I were seeking to compliment you, I would not put it in the future. You are not there yet. You are on the threshold. There is a whole art to acquire—or a profession, as you wish. That's what interests me about you—what is coming. To me, every beautiful woman is a potential tragedy."

"In what way?" she said, too interested to be self-conscious.

"A tragedy to those she consumes and exhausts." He drew back, studying her with more interest as he became interested in the subject. "You see, a beautiful woman—the professionally beautiful kind—quite a distinction, you know—is a social adventurer. She arrives as self-made men arrive; there is much in common between them." He smiled, adding more lightly: "I suppose at the present moment, you have made all sorts of good resolutions and you believe in them. Futility! Throw them away! You are doomed, my dear Mrs. Forrester. Society needs you. You will rule it and be its slave. You don't believe me?"

"I should not let him be talking to me this way," she thought, "and yet it is quite impersonal." Her curiosity was aroused at the half-serious, half-humorous way in which he dissected her. Was he only amusing himself?

"Can't I have a will of my own?" she said.

"A what?"

"A will of my own."

"You will have fashions of conducts, fashions of thinking, but will — that does not exist! A professionally beautiful woman must always be in style. She dresses, acts and thinks as other beautiful women do — because her life is to compete with them, and to compete with them she must attack them on their own territory. You are not convinced? Look at the dear things to-night." He reassured himself with a glance as to the modesty of his companion's *décolleté* and indicated, with a wave of his hand, the daring shoulders and throats of the dancers, adding: "Women, women, you are a perpetual delight! You are unfathomable. If you had suggested, five years ago, to any woman present that she would come to dress like this, how indignant she would have been! You may have the same feeling to-night — but next year you will do what Irma and Mrs. Challoner do, because they do it."

Amy, thinking of her cerise gown which Andrew had found too daring, laughed guiltily.

"Well, yes; but that's only a question of dress."

"Pardon me — question of style, and everything else will be a question of style. The dear ladies who tried to snub you to-night will become your inseparable friends the moment they see they cannot down you. And you, on your part, will give more time to them, your dearest rivals, than to your own family. You will have a sort of collective morality. You find Irma surrounded by a collection of young fetch-and-carries. You'll establish your own brigade or try to steal hers from her. You'll flirt as Irma flirts. You'll dare as Irma dares. You'll break the conventions as Irma breaks them."

"Why always Irma?"

"Oh, Irma is the perfect type of a society model. She has wit, she has taste, and she has a thorough instinct for avoiding the ice where it begins to grow thin. She is thoroughly convinced of the innocence of all her intentions — in fact, she is quite capable of founding a school of modern social philosophy."

"Aren't you making us out very immoral persons?"

"Immoral? Of course," he said cheerfully. "You are all profoundly immoral, but not in the sense you attach. You are immoral because you are irresponsible, because you are not really necessary. Immoral in another sense — no! That's the worst and the best of you. You avoid great emotions. They are too disturbing, and you can't take the time in society. You seek safe little emotions — to be constantly amused. The strongest emotion Irma has is jealousy of Gladys Challoner. They spend their lives attacking each other, poaching on each other's preserves. They outriveal each other in display; they are indispensable to each other; they call each other up on the telephone every morning and tear each other to pieces every night. Do you think any man can compete with the strength of such an attachment?" He stopped, laughed as a man who verges on an epigram, pleased at his discovery. "Gladys is a moral lightning-rod to Irma — it's what keeps her moral, in the ordinary sense of the word."

Womanlike, while listening to this diatribe, delivered half playfully, half seriously, she was seeking the personal explanation. Was he still in love with Irma Dellabarre? At the thought that this might be the reason of the satire, she felt a sharp pinch of annoyance which caused her to say acidly,

"And this is what I am to become? Thank you. You have a very bad opinion of me."

"I? Not at all! You'll see — society needs you. You will be one of its martyrs. You must be admired, imitated, and torn to pieces regularly, or society would be a very dull place. In a year or two, when I come back again, I shall hope to be your very good friend. Who knows, when next we meet, I may be foolish enough to lose my head!"

She laughed at the casual way he declared this impertinence, as though offering her an atoning compliment.

"Even with all your wisdom?"

"Oh, the wisest is the most vulnerable!"

"You know, I should be very angry at you, but you have the most amusing way of saying the most impossible things. Tell me, why do you talk to me like this? Is it just to amuse yourself?"

He looked at her and said solemnly,

"I am prophesying, you know!"

"So, in your eyes I am doomed?"

"There will be compensations," he said, with a smile.

She dropped her fan for a moment and raised her eyes, meditative, solemn, disturbed, in a long glance of inquiry.

"I believe you are more than half serious!"

"Serious — never! I never would be so impertinent as to tell the truth in a serious manner."

"But if I — permit you," she added, after a slight hesitation.

"Very well, then, I warn you — you can't play the game like Irma. If you have a spark of real emotion, it is dangerous to feed on sensation, even little sensa-

tions. They who live by sensations shall perish by sensations! A man with a conscience and a woman with a heart have no place here! In the end" — He hesitated a moment; his eyes met hers and looked down through them into the secret caverns with an impetuous boldness he had not shown before — "yes, in the end, there will be trouble. Ah, not just now — later, when you wake up."

"You don't think I am now, then," she said, avoiding his glance.

"No; I do not."

There was a long pause, during which she brought the soft, undulating feathers of her fan back again across her face.

"Are you really leaving soon?" she said, presently.

"Yes; I am going to take up my post in Madrid immediately."

"You are really a terrifying person to talk to," she said. "I don't know whether I'd care to repeat this experience."

"If I have told you the truth," he said quietly, "I have tried to keep to generalities."

She nodded — Andrew had not been mentioned.

At this moment, Tody Dawson descended on them like a runaway tower.

"Here, I say, Monte! Amy, we've been sending out search parties for you!"

She sprang up, genuinely glad for the interruption, startled at the intimacy which had grown over them. She felt annoyed, angry at herself, for the ease with which she had revealed herself, resenting also the impersonal quality of his curiosity, so utterly devoid of any tribute to her. No one had ever approached her in that attitude.

"He thinks I am only a child," she thought impatiently.

She determined, she did not know exactly why, that she would give him no further opportunity. When, later in the evening, he came up to ask her to dance, she refused.

IX

IT was well after two when the Forresters went to their rooms. The maid, dozing in the hall, sprang up hastily. Amy sent her away after the mystifying process of unhooking had been accomplished and slipping into a negligee, vibrantly awake, stood at the ivy-clad window looking down on the spectacle of the departing cars; the awaking throb of the motors, the sweeping, monstrous eyes searching the night, the will-o'-the-wisp flights across the countryside.

The echo of many compliments was pleasant in her ear, the consciousness not only of the evening's success but of all that the future would bring hung in her imagination like a disturbing perfume. She found herself recalling many things Monte Bracken had said to her and admitting their justice. She had seen her worth in the eyes of the women, feminine mirrors, which told more than the lip flattery of the men. But she was still an amateur, as Bracken had said, and she found herself thinking of Irma Dellabarre, of her poise, her exquisite taste, the charm of her manner, the ease of her silences, the naturalness and elegance of her movements.

"If I were a man, I should be crazy about her," she said to herself. "I wonder if he really is n't."

"Not sleeping?" said the voice of her husband.

"No, indeed!"

She left the window. Andrew wandered in, a cigar

in hand. His lawn tie was pulled loose. He had thrown off coat and vest, preparing to retire. He was in flowered suspenders, rosebuds on a satin background. The sight of these suspenders affected her disagreeably—the disillusioning intimacy of marriage.

“Did n’t you bring a dressing-gown?” she asked irritably.

“No — why?”

“You’ll catch cold after dancing,” she said hastily, surprised herself at this first critical impulse toward her husband.

“I did very little dancing,” he said shortly. “I must take some lessons to keep up. I did n’t know you were so fond of it.”

He started to light the cigar, took a puff and stopped guiltily, quenching it.

“I beg your pardon. I’m absent-minded to-night.” He looked at her with shining eyes. “Very proud of you this evening, Yum Yum.”

“I’m glad of that,” she said, ashamed of her annoyance.

“The prettiest there,” he said, nodding. He stopped before her, his head on one side, his eyes half closed, studying the dainty figure.

“What is it? Did I do something wrong?”

“No, no. I was just trying to figure out. Let’s see.”

He took up a scarf and, freeing the negligee, draped it about her shoulders. The *décolleté* thus exposed was in the manner of Mrs. Challoner.

“What a boy you are!” she said, with sparkling eyes.

“Turn around. A little lower in the back.”

When he had contemplated the delicate slope of

her shoulders, the whiteness of the skin, the slender and graceful column of the neck, he said:

"I knew it! Not one can touch you! As for Mrs. Challoner, we'll settle her!" he added proudly, even defiantly.

She watched him, amused at this sudden conversion, perceiving the working of new ideas behind his contemplation.

"So the cerise gown —"

"Mrs. Dellabarre dresses beautifully," he interrupted, smiling guiltily. "Young lady, some new dresses at once!" He looked at her again. "Mrs. Challoner, indeed!" he said indignantly.

Following his gesture she turned to the mirror. The daring of the deep *décolleté* he had arranged, the flaming scarf playing over the soft slopes of her velvety skin, brought to her eyes a glow of pleasure. She stood staring at the prophetic figure which confronted her.

"Don't spoil me, Andrew!" she said, turning abruptly and drawing her negligee hastily about her.

He had flung himself down in an armchair, plunged in a brown study, so absorbed that, forgetful of the past offense, he had again lit his cigar.

"What now?" she asked, surprised at his unusual mood. The satin suspenders, worked in rosebuds, stood before her eyes wherever she looked. What had possessed him to get them? Other men, like Monte Bracken, would never appear at such a disadvantage. He put his hand up as though to open the collar which cut into his neck.

"If he does, I shall scream," she thought.

But he contented himself with an easing of the corners. He blew out a great smoke ring.

"It's quite a revelation — coming here," he said, speaking to himself. "What do you think it can cost to run this place?"

"Heavens! How do I know?"

"You like it?" he said, looking at her fixedly.

"I adore it — naturally."

"Nothing second chop here," he said, wagging his head. "When we go back — we'll make a bonfire of what we've got."

"But Andrew —"

"It's trash. This has opened my eyes. Make a friend of Mrs. Dellabarre. She can teach you everything. Look at the way she runs her house, the order, the charm of it! I don't know how she does it — but I'm going to learn. Yes, sir; I'm going to have a home like this."

"Andrew, but how can we?"

"Why, all we need is a million," he said, unable to resist a touch of that humorous braggadocio which is the zest of the American parvenu. "Best and damn the expense! Amy, do you want it — say the word — you shall have it!"

Years before her father had dedicated his existence to her in almost the same words!

"Yes — but —"

"It means a few years plugging, but, by Jove, it's worth it!" he said boisterously. The feeling of his own unimportance in whatever sphere was one his mounting nature could not tolerate, and the lesson of the evening had been a hard one. He rose with the dogged fighting face of the old athlete. "Look here; we're going to enjoy life to the fullest, you and I. We're going to have everything life can give — and we're going to have the best. Andrew B. For-

rester is going to surprise a few people around these parts!"

She understood.

"You've decided to accept Mr. Gunther's offer!"

"Within ten minutes after I got here," he said beaming. "What! Are n't you pleased?"

"Yes, yes; I suppose so — if you want it. You take my breath away," she said soberly. She could not have told herself why, but the prospect frightened her. It seemed to her that she was dragging him out of his existence into a world she coveted.

"My, how serious we are!"

"But this afternoon, Andrew, you said we had enough," she began.

He dismissed the objection with a wave of his hand.

"This afternoon, my dear girl, I did n't know what money was worth!"

"If you go, I go with you," she said impulsively.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," he said emphatically. "You begin the fight here, and I'll tackle the other side." He caught her up and swung her to his shoulder, despite her laughing protests. "There! People are going to be mighty proud to know Mrs. Andrew B. Forrester!"

He set her down with sudden gravity and said joyfully, what, many times later, he was to recall with bitterness:

"And this morning I was satisfied! Fool that I was!"

An hour later, he was still awake, absorbed in dreams of ambition, filled with the zest of new worlds to conquer.

Amy, in the next room, heard him turning in his bed, mumbling to himself. She found it difficult to

rest. Long after she heard his heavy breathing, she remained awake. The haunted silence of the country night drew her out to the sighing of drifting leaves and sent her imagination wandering into the future. She felt almost as though she had committed a crime. What was this new world into which she was drawing him? Would it bring them together or insensibly separate them? Something in her better nature cried out strongly:

"He is making a mistake. This is not the way. He ought to take from you — make you follow him!"

All at once she sprang up and went to his bedside.

"Andrew!"

She said it softly, once, twice, and then turned away. Back in her bed, she wondered at her emotion. Why was she afraid?

"No one could ever be so kind," she said to herself resolutely. "He will always hold me by that!"

Her rest was fitful, disturbed by the echoes of catchy music which turned about her. All night she seemed to be dancing. Toward morning, she fell into a heavy sleep, in which she had a curious dream.

She was in the midst of a great ballroom and, whirling about her, were her father, Fifi, Uncle Tom, Mr. Dellabarre, every one she knew. She saw Andrew dancing with Mrs. Challoner, dancing very heavily, tripping and hopelessly muddled in his steps until Mrs. Challoner stopped suddenly and exclaimed:

"How absurd for you to ask me to dance! Why, you don't know the first thing about it!"

Every woman that Andrew invited to dance shook her head and laughed. All at once, to her horror, she perceived that he was in suspenders, white satin suspenders, worked with rosebuds!

Then she was dancing with him, piloting him through the swinging crowd. At first he stumbled, and she heard a titter in the crowd. When she looked round, they were alone on the glistening floor.

"Every one's stopped dancing," he said nervously.

"Don't stop, go on!" she said angrily. "They shan't make you ridiculous!" Little by little his awkwardness disappeared, his steps became smoother. Some one began to applaud. "Faster," she whispered, "faster!"

His arm became stronger. She no longer piloted him. It was his hand which guided her deftly. She was astonished at the rhythm and harmony of his movements.

"But it's wonderful — Andrew is a wonderful dancer! Why have n't I noticed it before?" she said.

And all at once, she looked up and saw she was dancing with Monte Bracken.

"You!"

He smiled his critical, amused smile.

"You see."

"But why have you come?"

"Because you did n't answer my question."

"What question?"

"Would you do it over again?"

Then every one seemed to be rushing about them; the great chandeliers overhead were swaying like a surging sea, the music thundered in her ears and she woke with a cry.

Andrew was in the room in a great coat, ready to leave. It was ten o'clock.

"A nightmare?" he said, laughing. "You've been tossing and mumbling to yourself at a great rate."

"Yes, yes."

"What frightened you?"

"I fell down-stairs or something or other," she said hastily.

X

IRMA DELLABARRE came in shortly after in a fluffy dressing gown, with Mon Amour's smutty nose peering from a pocket.

"I've ordered the darling's breakfast up here, and we can be as lazy as we want," she said, embracing Amy affectionately. "Kitty has had a telephone from New York and wants us to run up this afternoon for a spree. No; don't get up. You're a picture just as you are. What a fascinating bed-cap!"

"I'm afraid I'm awfully late," said Amy, making friends with the Pekinese.

"Late — not a bit! I get up with the chickens," said Irma, who had been called at ten. "My dear, it's wonderful that Mon Amour goes to you like that. He hardly ever does. He's never even accepted Rudy. Poor Rudy, he hates so to be barked at!"

Amy, in company with all Irma's acquaintances, could never be brought to see Mr. Dellabarre under the affectionate sobriquet of "Rudy." But Irma's public attitude toward her husband was a thing of mystery.

At this moment, the maid arrived with the three breakfasts. Mrs. Dellabarre examined with maternal solicitude the cream and bread destined for the favorite and held a consultation as to the menu of the day.

"Louise, tell Gervais that he has been giving Mon Amour too much red meat lately. Yes; you have been eating like a little pig," she added, shaking her

finger at the blinking Mon Amour, "and your little tum-tum won't stand it, no it won't. No more tournedos for a while, Louise. A little sweetbread for lunch, and be sure it's cooked enough — for tomorrow, some chicken livers. He'll be furious, I know, but he has the most delicate digestion," she added to Amy, "because he is a little prince, he is!"

"Miss Bane wants to know if you'd like to see the children," said Louise, "because they're to go to their grandma's."

"Of course I do. But not now — tell them to come down after lunch," said Mrs. Dellabarre, who had Mon Amour on her lap and was coaxing him to accept his saucer. "My dear, he's the most jealous thing! If I kiss the children, it sends him into a perfect fury."

"What a darling!" said Amy, smiling inwardly.

"You must get one at once. They're so affectionate! I'll select one for you," said Mrs. Dellabarre, who was never satisfied until she had imposed on her friends her doctor, her grocer, her dressmaker, and her dog-fancier. "It's really astonishing he takes to you," she added, as though, by that, Amy had taken new value in her eyes. "But you are so dainty and pretty, it's no wonder. You know, I was n't prepared to like you at all."

"Really?"

"I was just a little bit jealous. It's the first time Rudy ever invited any one without consulting me. And you know, or rather you will know, that wives must defend their rights."

"I'm sorry. I did n't realize."

"I'm delighted. You've won us all, you lovely child!" said Irma frankly. "And then, you've put Gladys's nose out of joint." She began to laugh.

"She thought I did it on purpose. Gladys is my best friend. Your ears must be tingling with all the compliments you've had!"

"Much chance I have when you're around!" said Amy, returning the compliment. "It's a very good thing my husband went away — after all he had to say about you last night."

Irma preferred the admiration which husbands do not confide to their wives; yet all flattery pleased her.

"How did you get on with Monte Bracken?" she said casually.

"I had the feeling of being chopped up and sorted into packages."

"Yes; that's his way. Poor Monte!"

"Why poor?"

"He's such a glorious failure," said Irma, pouring out the coffee. "All his brains are wasted on nothing. For Monte has brains. If he'd only had to work for his living, he'd have been some one, and he knows it. If only he had married the right sort of a wife!" she added, thinking of herself. "However, all women believe he's going to startle the world. What do you say to Kitty's idea?" she continued, changing suddenly. "We can pick up a couple of men in New York and do something amusing. There's really nothing doing here at all."

"Why, I think it would be lots of fun," said Amy, a little surprised at this restlessness.

"The truth is, Kitty's having a tremendous flirtation with Joe Barrisdale — you know, the one who married Anita Felton," said Irma, who made a short disquisition in genealogy. "They're separated. I believe there's some question of divorce, so Kitty has

to be very careful. The joke about it is that Kitty is crazy to have us believe she's a romantic character."

"And — is n't she?" said Amy, in surprise.

"Kitty!" said Irma, who began to laugh. "Kitty, my dear, is a little New England prude who's scared to death the moment she's left alone with a man. My dear, I know — they've told me! Only, she's frightened to death we'll suspect it. She's bound to be talked about if it kills her. Oh, you'll find lots like her."

"And lots who are not," said Amy, with a smile.

"Who ever knows," said Irma, shrugging her shoulders and beginning to brush Mon Amour's silky coat. "Most flirtations are harmless enough." She became serious. "You'll see. Men are not so desperately taken with us as we imagine. When you know you can get them — you're satisfied. It's human — is n't it? — to want to know your power?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Amy pensively.

"I'm not going to be an old scold and tell you all the horrors of marriage and how to manage your husband," said Irma, smiling. "Only, lots of things may puzzle you, and I don't want you to misunderstand me."

At this, Amy could not repress a smile.

"I see it'll be quite an amusing party to-night."

Irma, seeing that she did not have to do with a fool, said, with great frankness:

"Oh, yes; I like to play too. Exploring is such fun — when you are sure of yourself."

"And you are?" said Amy, enjoying this confession, which brought them to equality.

"It's a question of principle," said Irma resolutely. "It would be foolish to say that all the women we

know are innocent. They're not. With me, it's different. I have my children and my husband and I intend to be a virtuous wife. Why? Because I hate vulgarity, perhaps. That would always stop me, if nothing else. This is rather frank, but I feel we're going to be close friends, and I don't want you to misunderstand me — do you see?"

"I see," said Amy, with a twinkle in her blue eyes.

"Rudy, who is the best husband in the world," said Irma contentedly, "can't understand that the wife who keeps her admirers public is the last one to worry over." She nodded, smiling to herself over some stored-up confidence. "If I were a husband I should only be suspicious when no man was attentive to my wife. Be careful to make your husband understand that, my dear," she added, unable to resist the temptation of an older married woman to point the danger.

"Oh, Andrew's quite the other way," said Amy, with a touch of pride. "Really he is the kindest being in the world. He knows I'm dreadfully young, and he wants me to enjoy life just as though — well, not exactly as though I had n't married, but — you know what I mean. He wants me to play just as before, and he is n't jealous in the least if other men are attentive. Besides, I shall be careful to do nothing he does n't like."

Irma, who underneath the lightness of her manner, did not lack perspicacity, was thinking, "I wonder if that pretty child knows the force she is playing with." It was a little habit of hers, when a man strongly attracted her, to imagine the beneficent results which would have come to him if he had been so fortunate as to have won her as a wife. Aloud she said:

"He is very wise — because, well, you are fright-

fully young and attractive, and it might have been very hard for you."

"I am not half good enough for him," said Amy in a burst of confidence. "At the bottom, I'm terribly frivolous, I'm afraid."

"And a great flirt," said Mrs. Dellabarre, smiling directly into her eyes.

"I?"

"Yes, my dear, you are, and the more dangerous because it's instinctive. Look out. The dangerous women are not the professional coquettes. Every man who meets them is warned, and forewarned is forearmed. No, no; if I were a man, I should be mortally afraid of a little person, with the eyes of a Madonna and quiet ways, who can still blush when she's pleased."

"Is she warning me to keep off her preserves?" thought Amy to herself and, as she did not lack astuteness or a sense of humor, she said, taking the older woman's hand affectionately, "I'm afraid I don't know much about myself, but if you're going to let me be friends, will you make an agreement. If I ever trespass unconsciously, you'll warn me?"

This was said with a smile breaking about the little red lips that gave a more direct significance to her words.

"You are quite adorable!" said Irma, embracing her and covering her confusion with a laugh. "We'll call it a treaty, then. And to prove my generosity, I'll surrender one of my crocodiles. Oh, I'd have to do it, anyway!"

Amy, who comprehended perfectly that she was thus to acquire Mr. Tody Dawson, played the innocent.

"Crocodiles?" she said, raising her eyebrows.

"That's my expression, my dear. Crocodiles are admirers who want to look very dangerous but can't move quickly enough to catch you — and who like to shed crocodile tears, of course. Tody and Jap are young crocodiles — quite harmless. Don't worry about them. I've trained them thoroughly. They know quite well if they're docile and faithful and don't try to use their teeth, we'll reward them by finding a good match for them."

"But are they so harmless?" said Amy thoughtfully.

"Absolutely," said Irma, with conviction. She turned to her with more friendliness. "My dear, let me give you one piece of advice: When in a tight corner, laugh. The most dangerous man can't stand being laughed at!" She rose, cuddling Mon Amour in her arms, suddenly solicitous. "The only trouble about to-night is what shall I do with this darling? Mon Amour is so wretched to be left alone — and then the night air is so dangerous for the little dear, and if anything happened to him — oh, and about to-night, of course I promised Kitty not to breathe a word about Joe. She'll do that herself the moment she gets a chance at you — you understand. And as for Rudy, well, there's no use — of course, there's no real reason, but there's no use in mentioning whom we meet — poor Rudy is so fidgety, you know!"

XI

AFTER luncheon, Miss Bane ushered in the children, immaculate and rigid, as though they moved in a spotless existence; Rudolph, Junior, aged six, and Doris, who, at the age of eight, was shooting up so rapidly that Irma never saw her without feeling that she was doing it on purpose. Under the directing eye of Miss Bane, they made the rounds of the table, gravely performing precise courtesies and arrived finally before their mother, whom they contemplated in wondering admiration, as if she were some strange fairy princess. Irma gathered them in impulsively, one under each arm, and embraced them rapturously.

Mon Amour, from his high chair specially made, began to bark in angry thin yapping.

"There, there; I won't kiss them any more," said Irma soothingly. "Did it make him jealous? No; he shan't be teased."

"And how old are you, dear?" said Amy to Doris.

"Eleven, going on twelve," said that young lady innocently.

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Dellabarre, in a shriek. "Who told you to say that? Tell me at once, Doris — at once."

"Mr. Laracy," said the child, looking frightened.

"Mr. Laracy is a very impertinent person," said Irma, looking daggers at that young joker, who had retired in convulsions of mirth behind his plate. But as the laugh was general, she yielded to it. "Jap,

I'll never forgive you — she's quite too enormous as it is!"

"Why, mother?" said Doris, opening her eyes.

"Never mind, my dear," said the mother. "Now be good children and behave properly, and don't sit down in the grass," she added impressively.

The children nodded solemnly and went out. The next moment, they heard them whooping joyfully as they ran out to the motor.

At five o'clock the motors were brought out for a run into the city. Laracy, in the runabout, shot ahead with Mrs. Challoner, while Tody Dawson, at the wheel of the great touring car, directed the stowing of the valises, and a copious supply of rugs against the return home.

"What about Mr. Challoner?" said Amy, who found herself in the back seat with Kitty Lightbody.

"Jack? My, you *are* an innocent little thing!" said Mrs. Lightbody, rolling her large china eyes. "Take husbands along! Say, child, we're out for a good time." She began to hum merrily to herself, wagging her head in time with her feet, which had already begun to dance. "Lordy me, I'm just expiring for one real spree!"

"But there are not enough men to go around, it seems to me," said Amy, concealing her amusement.

Mrs. Lightbody looked at her with a little suspicion.

"Did n't Irma tell you? Charlie Pardee and Captain Barrisdale are going to join us."

"I'm really quite a country mouse," said Amy maliciously, for she had certain scores to settle; "you must help me not to make any mistakes."

"In what way?"

"Tell me who belongs to whom. I don't want to

make an enemy of Mrs. Challoner. Is it Pardee or Barrisdale?"

Kitty laughed, looked quite flustered, laughed again nervously, and finally made up her mind to explain.

"Charlie Pardee is Gladys's property," she said.

"And Captain Barrisdale is Irma's?"

"I guess *not!*" said Kitty Lightbody vehemently.

"Oh, I see!" said Amy, laughing. "I was dense, was n't I?"

"When I say 'property' —" said Mrs. Lightbody, hesitating between two fears, either to appear too rapid or not rapid enough.

"Oh, I understand perfectly. All right; I won't trespass."

"Of course, when I say 'property,'" said Mrs. Lightbody, looking a little worried, "that's just an expression."

"Now *she's* going to explain," thought Amy, and she waited with delight while her companion floundered on.

"Of course, my dear, it's all innocent enough, at least on my part. What Gladys does, the Lord knows! You can't stop all flirtation just because you're married — can you?"

"Evidently not."

"My dear, that would be too boresome. It would make us hate marriage, would n't it?" said Mrs. Lightbody, who prided herself on a sense of logic. "Of course, you're just a bride, and that's different. But after you're married a year or two, you can't be going around *all alone* where other women are, can you? Ted — that's my husband — and I understand each other perfectly. He would n't like it at all if no men paid me attention."

"Oh, that's what Andrew says to me."

"Really, dear? Now, that is sensible. But you mustn't misunderstand. There's nothing really wrong in flirting the way I do. I like a good time. Lord, we've got so little time to enjoy ourselves in this world," said Mrs. Lightbody, with a huge sigh. "But, my dear, I'm most careful. And I make men understand that. If they want to fall in love with me, all right; but they must respect me because I am —"

"A virtuous wife," suggested Amy softly.

"Er — yes. Yes; that's it," said Mrs. Lightbody, so taken back that for several moments she stared blankly ahead, without a word to say.

"And Mrs. Dellabarre?" said Amy pensively, with a significant look at Irma, who was bending over Tody Dawson. "Is she a virtuous wife too?"

Mrs. Lightbody responded by raising her eyebrows.

"Irma — oh, Irma's a mystery. Of course, I don't mean to insinuate anything — but Irma's strange, very strange — really, don't ask me!"

At the end of a moment, Amy burst out laughing.

"What are you laughing at, my dear?" said Kitty anxiously.

"Thinking what a splendid chaperon I'm going to be."

"My dear, I suppose you thought I was frightfully sniffy last night," said Mrs. Lightbody, who had a suspicion that her companion was laughing at her for some reason or other and ascribed it to a desire to even up the score. "I was; but I didn't know who you were, did I? You have to be so careful with strangers."

"Oh, naturally," said Amy, who was too amused to

cherish resentment, for, by this time, she had come to perceive Kitty Lightbody's place as a foil to Irma and Gladys Challoner — a heavy centerpiece, diverting and useful for the purposes of contrast.

"But you must n't mind me — it's just my way," continued Mrs. Lightbody, whose bad manners were instinctive. "Really, I admire you, my dear, and I'm sure I'm going to like you enormously."

"Thank you."

"And I hope you'll like me," added Mrs. Lightbody, who gave her confidence generously. "Every one makes the goat of me, but I don't mind. I'm for a good time in this little burg — a short life but a merry one! Don't think I have n't had my trials — I have!" she continued, screaming in Amy's ear against the whip of the wind. "I would be in a sanatorium now, if I wanted to take things seriously. But what's the use — and, then, your husband is n't worse than any one else's, is he? What's the use of quarreling? Let him go his way and you go yours. I'm going to enjoy myself, I am!"

They were passing out of the open country into the suburbs of New York, through the shanty civilization of mingled hordes, who watched the swift passage of the world from communal flats, with tired, memory-haunted eyes, hoping for the day when they too would move on. Incompleted factories; frame shelters to let; parceled lots shaggy with unkempt grass elbow to elbow with pretentious brick stores; garish trimmings; noise and confusion; transitory thrift — stagnant acceptance of life crowded about them in these multitudes who had camped the day before and would crowd dustily on with the morrow.

They did not comprehend poverty or have the illu-

minating vision which sees beyond mediocrity the climbing generations. Poverty and mediocrity offended their delicate nostrils like the odor of some disfiguring disease. On Amy it had a depressing effect — like the conjured terrors of a sermon. Poverty existed as a warning — the harvest of evil. It brought her closer to Andrew, to what she had dreamed of making of their marriage. While Kitty was rushing on torrentially, she was peering out at the soiled children, the old women set in the gaping windows, the bleakness and the shiftlessness that rolled on like a Gipsy caravan.

She made sudden resolutions. Her husband should never be to her like Kitty Lightbody's or Gladys Chaloner's. What she did, she would do openly, with his full knowledge. A little season of youthful extravagance, to feel the fever of gaiety and to grow tired of it. Afterward — in a few years — to grow into womanhood and responsibility. It was right that she should have this hour — her woman's hour. Andrew understood this need in her —

But all at once, ahead, the great Williamsburg Bridge, with its electric necklaces, leaped across the melting night. Beyond the dusky, rolling river, shot with glowworms, the blazing towers of New York flamed against the horizon; fiery balls of light, tossed above the theatric flash of glass palaces which reached upward to the conquest of the sky.

"Don't you love it?" said Mrs. Lightbody ecstatically. "Don't you just LOVE it?"

They glided skilfully among concentrating hordes, checked and held in new multitudes, multitudes that had the feeling of the mingled East. They were caught in the jam of the holiday hour, surrounded by

wabbling peddlers' wagons, Hebrew, American, and negro; trucks with brawny, half naked drivers; thronged trolleys, white with the last warmth of the summer; long, grim funeral processions jogging back to life; strident, creaking cars packed with family parties; mediocrity everywhere on wheels, happy, hot, and noisy, eying them with covetous admiration as they, the privileged caste, passed, unrelated and irresponsible, through the churning, struggling crowd.

They did not see the soiled present at their sides or divine the challenge of the future. Ahead, across the floating span, was the magic of the night, a breathless, nervous city pursuing the phantom of pleasure with the same dynamic intensity with which, during the ugly day, it had scrambled for the wealth it would leave for future generations to enjoy. The tired masculine day was over, yielding to the glittering, feminine night, and in the hanging gardens of the air was the feeling of music and dancing. The night was feminine; the night was theirs. Each felt a quickening of the nerves, an awaking appetite, a sudden joy of existence, a sense of possession by the right of her position, her charm, and her power. All the extravagance of pleasure, all the multiple electric allurements to the eye, the singing call of violins, the moving color of laughing crowds existed for them.

Kitty Lightbody, rebel against a life of monotony and drudgery, cried, with a staccato laugh:

"At last! My, it's grand to have just *one* good time!"

They passed out of the high chill of the river into the sudden warm breath of the tenemented city and ran down to the Langdon Hotel, where the runabout was waiting.

"Gang's up-stairs," said Laracy, with a fat flourish of his hand.

Amy sought hungrily through the crowd in the vestibule. One glance, and she experienced a quiet satisfaction. Beside Mrs. Challoner was Charlie Pardee, a slim, blond youth, with the usual flowing hair and pleasing face, unmarred by lines of heavy thought; Captain Barrisdale, an Anglo-American mining Croesus, dark, heavy-shouldered, copiously scented, and receptively handsome, and behind them, as she had divined he would be from the first, Monte Bracken.

XII

IMMEDIATELY Amy was satisfied that Monte Bracken would be there, she felt a sharp return of her former irritation. She gave him her hand loosely, turning to the others, who were already discussing new plans for the evening. Dressing was voted a bore, the conventional restaurant another bore, theater a dreadful bore, and slumming the only real thing to do.

"Slumming is too adorable!" claimed Mrs. Lightbody, bobbing up and down and clapping her hands without notice of the staring crowd. "I just adore slumming. You can have so much more fun when nobody's watching!"

They dined at a beer-garden in Harlem, amused themselves noisily at a melodrama in the Grand Opera House, until warned by the management, and came down Broadway, dipping into chop-suey restaurants, flashy cabarets, and shoddy dance halls. At two o'clock, after this profound study of the habits of the unexplored races which live about Fifty-ninth Street, they returned to civilization, for a little breathing spell at a roof garden.

"Hello," said Mrs. Challoner, who was ahead, "if here are n't our husbands!"

Challoner, a strapping coal miner, pitchforked into society by the genius of a masterful father, greeted her without surprise.

"Sober?" said Mrs. Challoner, raising her eyebrows.

"Fairly."

"Amusing yourself?"

"So-so."

"Want us to clear out?"

"No; we're quite respectable — are n't you?"

"Good Lord, friend husband — would n't you know it?" exclaimed Kitty, in whispered anguish to Amy. "For heaven's sake hang on to the captain, or there'll be murder!" With a rapid motion, she attached herself to Laracy's arm, who, after a start of surprise, being a wide-awake young gentleman, comprehended the rôle he was to play.

The meeting of the Lightbodys was simplicity itself.

"Hello, what are you doing here?"

"Hope I'm not in your way, Ted dear."

"You? No. Why should you?"

He nodded affably to the rest, and followed Challoner back to their party in an opposite box — a thin, middle-aged, bow-legged, horsy man, quite bald and world-weary.

"Touching family reunion," said Bracken meditatively. "And there is still a blue law forbidding husbands to kiss their wives in public."

"What an awful moment!" said Amy, who, convinced by Mrs. Lightbody's agitation, was awaiting a touch of melodrama. "What will she tell him?"

"I say, Amy — you are green!" said Tody Dawson, from his superior worldly wisdom. "Ted Lightbody care what Kitty does? That's a good one!" He went off into a roar of laughter.

"But then —"

"Oh, that's just Kitty's way of appearing devilish!"

"Dancing this with me, are n't you?" said Captain Barrisdale, stalking up.

"Under orders?" said Amy, with a laugh.

The captain was not a subtle person.

"Been dying to break away the whole evening," he said, with a killing glance. "I say, you dance like an angel."

"Look out; I'll tell on you."

"Good heavens, no! Kitty would give me a beastly dressing down," he said hastily. "I say, you would n't do that. You're too good a sport. By George, I could dance all night with you!"

"Better not."

"Say the word, and I'm game," he said rashly.

"You are direct, are n't you?" she said, leading him on.

"Yes; I don't take long to make up my mind." He added pointedly, "I've been watching you."

"And you never are disappointed?"

"Eh, what? Oh, I see you're making fun of me," he said, in short breaths, for the task of guiding her through the whirling crowd was an ordeal.

"Clever man!"

"Look here; suppose we sit this out."

"Thought you could dance all night with me."

He laughed and stopped short.

"I like you; you've got spirit. Sit down here a moment." He turned and stared at her. "Have I met you before? Tell me about yourself. What are you — married, divorced, or a widow?"

"You must be awfully rich," she said, demurely.

"Why? Oh, I see! No offense. I just wanted to know."

"Ask Kitty, then."

He made a wry face.

"Look here; you don't think I'm in love with Kitty Lightbody now?"

"No; you could n't be. You're a married man."

He looked at her a long moment, studying her, not used to an attitude of opposition in the women he condescended to admire.

"I can't make you out," he said, frowning.

"Perhaps I'm divorced."

"I wish you were."

"Heavens, how rapid you are! Look out; Kitty's watching you!"

"Look here," he said, "if you don't believe I say what I mean, ride back to Chilton with me in my car."

She stood up, laughing, as another dance began.

"Will you?"

"Tell you later," she said evasively. If Mrs. Lightbody wished to use her as a screen, she could take the consequences.

Mrs. Lightbody, who had, in fact, watched them with growing anxiety, greeted them with a marked petulance.

"Joe, come right away from that designing blond young woman! You're entirely too attentive."

"Captain Barrisdale has followed your orders splendidly," said Amy slowly.

"What orders?"

"Why, did n't you tell him to make love to me?"

Barrisdale pulled at his mustache and shot her an imploring glance from under his tufted eyebrows.

"Well, Joe, the joke's on you," said Mrs. Lightbody acidly, "and serves you right, too, wasting your time on a bride!"

Barrisdale, overcome at this revelation, murmured

something inaudible amid the laugh which arose at his expense, while Mrs. Challoner examined Amy with more care, recognizing an ability to defend herself.

Tiernan's, where they next entered as the clock was striking three, finally satisfied their craving for Bohemia, with its hilarity, its banks of acrid smoke, its explosive laughter, and its flashing beauties.

"Don't you just adore it?" said Kitty excitedly. "Did you ever see such people! Oh, Lord, what good times men do have!"

Freed from the censureship of social eyes and a little excited, she began to grow kittenish, in a determined effort to rival the formidable youth of Amy Forrester. Mrs. Challoner, with her impenetrable, smiling calm, sipping her glass of champagne, frowned significantly.

"Kitty, be careful!"

"A short life but a merry one!" exclaimed Mrs. Lightbody recklessly, looking around with thirsty eyes. She gathered in every tribute, even to the meanest, to the slanted glances of the heavy-jowled dancers, to the stares of the ratty waiters, crediting all to her personal account. "I'm just waking up. Look to yourself, Gladys!"

The caution did not apply to Mrs. Challoner. At most, on the sculptured white cheeks, a tongue of red showed and in the eyes a sparkle of gathering excitement. To Amy, she was, and always remained, a complete mystery.

"She looks as though she had just come out of the ice-box," she thought to herself. "Is she capable of emotion? What attracts men to her?" Mrs. Challoner had a high-bred disdain of the crowd, a fastidi-

ous air of perpetually looking down on some one. Amy remembered Morley's description of her former mistress and wondered. What was she like in her own home, when the front door had been closed for the night.

The sounds of rising laughter, the whirling, breathless swaying of the dancers, the staccato music, glances and whispers divined the awakening of the primitive savage, the spectacle of this boisterous relaxation aroused in her the appetite for movement. She danced ceaselessly, never tired, never visibly excited. Once Amy caught a glimpse of what burned beneath the surface — a sudden glance in her direction when Charlie Pardee was lingering beyond the needs of strict politeness. He saw it, and left her instantly and docilely.

"If I were a man," thought Amy, remembering the look, "I should never fall in love with her. I should n't dare!"

She would have liked to discuss her with Monte Bracken. Up to now, it had amused him to acquiesce in the attitude of indifference she had assumed towards him.

She resented this, as she had resented everything he had done or left undone. Nevertheless, she was always conscious of his presence, whether she followed him in the tangle of the dancers or caught the fragments of his conversation with Irma, fragments which came to her through the jumble of the strident evening. She watched the two covertly, wondering how deep his interest went, resenting the intimacy of their conversation.

"He thinks I'm too much of a child to put himself out," she thought irritably. When he should ask her

to dance, as finally he must, she would refuse curtly, with some sharp answer which would bring him to a realization of her displeasure.

He rose, at last, and approached where she sat on the fringe of the rushing crowd. A little gleam came into her eyes.

"Mrs. Forrester?" he said, bowing.

She turned, as though in surprise.

"Yes?"

"May I give you the opportunity of refusing to dance this with me," he said, looking good-humoredly into her eyes.

"Why?" she said, taken back.

"Because you will refuse."

She got up suddenly.

"Let's dance!"

He obeyed.

"If only he did n't dance so divinely," she thought, as the next moment they glided surely and dexterously through the dancers, avoiding the lumbering heavy ships which bore down on them. All at once, a memory of what he had told her came into her mind.

"I thought you were going abroad?"

"I am — day after to-morrow."

All her antagonism left her. She did not know why, but the knowledge that he was leaving, that he would go out of her life, changed everything. He was going — that was the essential thing.

"I've been trying to snub you, but you would n't let me," she said gently.

"Because I guessed too much?"

"I don't admit you guessed right," she said, laughing in some confusion. "However, I've been horrid. Forgive me?"

"I had n't noticed it," he said pleasantly.

"He does n't the least care what I do," she thought angrily. "He thinks I am throwing myself at him like a hundred other women. I am a little idiot."

In a moment, she stopped him.

"Floor's really too crowded — and beside, you don't enjoy dancing like this."

"It is crowded."

When she came to her seat at the table, she looked at him with a smile, which she was far from feeling.

"Don't be polite. Go back to Mrs. Dellabarre."

Laracy passed; she summoned him and returned into the crush again. But this pointed revenge brought her no satisfaction. Why had she accepted the dance with him? Why had she sought to excuse herself and, above all, what had possessed her to show her ill-humor? He was sitting beside Irma — she could see him from time to time — and he did not even take the pains to notice what she did.

She began to flirt openly with the other men, tolerating even Barrisdale, trespassing recklessly, feeling that in the smile she gave another she was punishing him.

In truth, her success was easy, for she was the only one to whom pleasure was young. To her, it was not a mental intoxicant but a natural impulse. This rushing progress from restaurant to restaurant, this delight of music and rhythmic motion, the hundred little episodes which sent them into peals of laughter, were all of the sparkling surface. She saw nothing below the sheen of pleasure, neither the flight from boredom nor the lurking shadows of covetousness and frenzy. To her, this world was really young and gay and happy, and, eager as a child, she succeeded in com-

municating something of this illusion to the rest. When five o'clock arrived, and the moment for the flight before the dawn, she gave a cry of disappointment.

"What — already?"

The chagrin of her exclamation was so unconscious that even Mrs. Challoner laughed. Barrisdale, to whom this riotous sense of youth was peculiarly appealing, found a moment, as they were entering the automobile, to whisper in her ear:

"Joke's on me — this time. Never mind; I don't forget, and I can wait."

"What does that mean?" she said, laughing. He was too clumsy to inspire fear, a true crocodile, as Irma expressed it.

"Next year, we'll meet again," he said pointblank, "and then you may not be so indifferent."

She frowned, turned her shoulder, and sprang into the car.

"What a stupid, heavy person!" she thought. "I suppose he's had too much."

Would Bracken come in the car with them, she wondered, looking back. There was a moment's whispered consultation between Mrs. Challoner and Mrs. Dellabarre, who immediately announced:

"Monte and I'll try the runabout. Meet you at Garden City."

The racing car, with Irma swallowed up in furs, shot out, leading the way. It was still murky; the streets were abandoned, the lamps sickly in the dawn which came oozing heavily over the housetops. As they left the city and rose lightly over the spanned river, the early truck wagons loomed at their sides, redolent of the country. A child lay asleep on a heap

of vegetables. Horses plodded ahead in somnambulist fantasy with drowsy drivers. Gray vapors curled along the water front in the drifting confusion of sky and earth. In the car they began to sing to keep up their spirits against the cold bite of strange hours.

"By George, Amy, you've got more life than the whole crowd!" said Tody, under his breath. "They are n't within a mile of you."

"What — none?"

"Not one. Well, you've got me. When you want me just whistle," he added, with a laugh. "I'm bowled over."

"You're a nice boy, Tody!" she said, lightly patting his arm, without thinking of what she heard.

The next moment there came a shriek from behind. The motor ground to a stop. Kitty Lightbody solemnly descended.

"Kitty, what in heaven's name is the matter with you?" said Mrs. Challoner, who was sleepy and cross.

"If he wants to devote himself to you," said Kitty, with a toss of her head, "let him!"

"What? Who? Is it Joe? Good heavens, she's jealous."

"Kitty, come back; we all love you," said Laracy.

Mrs. Lightbody, camped in the middle of the Jericho Turnpike at five in the morning, sulkily refused to budge.

"Well, see here," said Laracy, rising as the diplomat; "fix it this way. Kitty shall sit in the middle. You don't mind, do you, Gladys?"

"Mind? I should say not! What do you suppose I care about old Joe Barrisdale!" said Mrs. Challoner sharply. This sally raised a laugh not at all to the

enjoyment of the captain. "Kitty, stop being a fool and get in this minute. Joe Barrisdale, what are you sitting there for? Jump out and bring her back."

Mrs. Lightbody, being properly coaxed, cajoled, and threatened, consented to return, and, having returned, presently began to nod, to the delight of Mrs. Challoner and the captain, who made pantomimic love before her closed eyes.

On the pike, just beyond Garden City, they found the runabout waiting.

"Here, Gladys," said Irma, calmly bundling out, "you take my place. Monte's cold and sleepy and perfectly unbearable. We've been quarreling all the way."

Amy glanced at Monte Bracken, who was handing her into the car. If they had been quarreling, his face did not show it.

"Well, it's good-by," he said, taking off his hat and offering his hand.

"You're really sailing Saturday — lucky man!" said Kitty drowsily.

"Really off."

He shook hands with Amy, without either indifference or interest, and returned to the runabout. For a while, the two machines ran on together. Then, at a fork in the road, the runabout shot away and passed from sight.

"So much for that," said Amy to herself, "and perhaps just as well."

A feeling of comfortable virtue succeeded. She remembered Andrew. What a lot she would have to tell him!

At six, just as the sun bobbed up over the horizon, they ran up to the house. A window shade

went up, and the bushy little head of Mr. Dellabarre appeared.

"There's Rudy!" said Irma, waving gaily. Her glance met his and turned away. How long had he been up and what was in his mind?

They went stamping and laughing into the dining room and sent out a foraging party for breakfast.

"What let's do?" said Laracy. "Time for a bunny-hug before the coffee. Who's game?"

"Come on," said Amy, springing up; "I'm just waking up!"

"Mercy sakes!" said Kitty Lightbody, heavy-eyed.

She rose with a sigh, and held out her hand to the captain, who was yawning surreptitiously, but when, breakfast over, her young rival declared it was no use thinking of sleep at such an hour, she threw up her hands in despair and retreated to her bedroom.

"Good night, children — not too much noise. I have my complexion to think of," said Mrs. Dellabarre, with a laugh, and, after a sleepy struggle, Barrisdale shook his head and likewise surrendered, while Youth triumphant, in the beaming figure of Jap Laracy, was asking:

"What now? Amy's game! Bridge, a spin in the machine, or a dash on the ponies?"

XIII

WHEN flushed with a gallop in the glow of the morning, the three came riotously back, Andrew, who had been traveling half the night to reach her, was waiting up-stairs. Amy threw herself in his arms, laughing like a child.

"Oh, Andrew, such a good time! Wait until you hear!"

She told him all breathlessly, that is, almost all. She made no reference to the one disagreeable memory of the night, Barrisdale's heavy overtures. She had handled such boors before, even as a *débutante*, and there was no use in telling him things which would annoy him. Then Monte Bracken's presence was not her secret. At the end, his face was radiant.

"Beat them to a finish, Yum Yum! Go it, and mind you sweep the decks every time!"

"Andrew, what a darling you are!"

"And now for business. I've agreed to take up Gunther's proposition."

He began a long detailed exposition of the possibilities of the new venture. From his face she could see the gravity of the step to him. So she tried hard to comprehend the details he minutely explained to her. But she was too mentally excited and too physically tired. She understood nothing at all, only that, some day soon, they would have lots of money if certain things worked out. When he had finished, she embraced him rapturously.

"Is n't it wonderful?" she cried, still perplexed. "But, Andrew, you must n't work too hard — promise."

"I promise," he said grimly, his mind filled with dreams of the gilded future in which all his hopes would come true.

She went into her bath quite satisfied by this assurance.

Three weeks later in the vast span of the Grand Central Station, quite a party gathered to see Andrew Forrester off to Mexico. It was still ten minutes before the train's departure. Mrs. Lightbody and Mrs. Dellabarre, with Dawson, Laracy, and young Pardee, hung back discreetly, while Amy, tiny and fragile against the broad shoulders of her husband, walked with him down the platform.

Filkins, the private secretary, who was to accompany him, came up briskly.

"Everything in place?"

"Everything, Mr. Forrester."

"Get all the evening papers—and some magazines."

"Yes, sir."

A late arrival came running down the platform; Filkins flitted away.

"I can't bear to let you go alone," said Amy, clinging to his arm. "I don't think it's right, Andrew — I don't."

There was a break in her voice, and her eyes grew misty. She had come down gaily, after a merry luncheon, and now, all at once, before the grim mystery of life's parting, this grinning mask that confronted her, she felt a sinking in her heart, a terror of unknown things.

"Why, little girl, it's only a jump there and back this time. Only a week or two," he said, patting her arm. He looked at her, detecting the gathering tears. "Here, here; it's not so bad as all that."

"Oh, but it's the *first* time!" she said incoherently, swaying against his shoulder. "Andrew, Andrew, we ought n't to be separated. I feel it. I know it. My duty's with you."

"Well, perhaps next time."

She looked up into his face, fear and helplessness in her eyes.

"What is it, little girl?"

"Then you think I ought to have gone with you? Andrew, Andrew, tell me the truth."

"Of course I don't," he said stoutly.

"I will — I'll jump on the car now — just as I am," she said, under the hypnotic terror of all this flurry of coming and going, this sense of looming unexplored horizons of life ahead — and behind.

He drew his arm tighter about her and bent suddenly, careless who saw them, to seek her lips.

"Of course it's only a couple of weeks, is n't it?" she said heavily, at the end of the long embrace that shut out the shrieking confusion about them.

"Perhaps not that," he said, lying to comfort her, for her grief affected him, too. "I say — do you think you'd better wait, Amy dear? It's sort of bad luck, seeing the train off."

"No, no; I can't leave — not now — please don't ask that of me."

"All right, then. Better now?" He drew her back to the group of friends who pressed up for the last farewells. "Good-by, every one — good-by, Mrs. Lightbody — good-by, boys — good-by, Mrs. Della-

barre — mighty good of you to see me off. I say, cheer up my little girl, will you? Don't let her get too lonely." He caught up Amy, lifting her almost off her feet, laughing. "Back in a fortnight, perhaps —"

And the train was already in motion as he caught the step.

She stood with her handkerchief waving feebly in the air as the train wound out in snaky flight, dwindled, and was gone.

"Partings are awful. I can't bear them," she said, gulping down a sob.

"I know. I feel the same way every summer. It's quite natural, dear," said Mrs. Dellabarre, who had waited by her. She had never had such an emotion when leaving Rudolph, and yet, she was rather affected by her friend's distress. She linked her arm under Amy's, murmuring sympathetically, "What a child it is!"

In order that Mrs. Forrester should not languish in teary solitude, they danced in the newest dance hall, dined, and arrived for the second act of a musical comedy. At two o'clock, as Amy declared, if she went home, she would n't sleep a wink, they decided to make a night of it. Tody Dawson was devotion itself, so kind and so solicitous that Amy, in her gratitude, gave him a compensating smile — he really was the dearest boy.

In a week, her days were crowded with engagements, her nights brilliant with sensations that were still young to her. To be out, to be seen, to be envied, sought after, adopted, and raised to the giddy pinnacle of a new favorite seemed to her the height of a woman's destiny. In a month, she belonged to so-

ciety — to men in the aggregate, to the mass and the public eye, avid of the latest novelty.

“Andrew will be so proud of me,” she thought loyally, in her moments of triumph, as though, in serving his vanity, she were performing her whole duty of a wife.

PART II

PART II

I

EIGHTEEN months later, on a brilliant morning in April, when in the sky the gray winter fled before the triumphant rush of spring, Mr. Tody Dawson, after a late night, awoke to the consciousness that a disagreeable morning was ahead. A college degree from one of our modern gymnasiums had brought him the classic privilege of a university club, where the necessary luxuries of life are obtainable to the impecunious crowd. Pigeonholed in a compartment twelve by ten on the eleventh shelf of this human filing machine, he enjoyed not only the services of a valet, a squash court, a restaurant, a library, and the fattening opportunities of the card rooms but, by resorting to the free-lunch counter on the rare occasions when he failed to be fed socially, he was able to support a racing car and frequent the most exclusive tailors and haberdashers. Ordinarily of smiling humor and serene self-complacency, he rose this morning angry at the complex scheme of things in general and at Mr. Tody Dawson in particular.

“What got into me, anyway?” he said, staring at the reflection of his elongated and bony figure clad in lavender pajamas. “Good Lord, I should have known better! It was that tricky music, or perhaps the punch. I don’t know which. Well, I’m in for it — that’s sure.”

A shower did not relieve either his ill-humor or the ache in his head. Everything went wrong. He had forgotten to put out his boots, the new spring suit he had intended to wear had not been returned from the tailor, though they had sworn an oath on it. To cap which, despite twenty-five years of subjugation, his hair had developed sudden rebellions which defied the brush.

He was in this state of irritation and misery when Jap Laracy burst in, fresh as a schoolgirl, a flower in his buttonhole, ready for breakfast and the day. At Dawson's disheveled appearance, he stopped short and emitted a whistle of surprise.

"Hello, there! A little *Katzenjammer*?" he said, amused, as a best friend has the right to be at the evidence of the morning's headache. "It's a lovely day."

"Is it?" said Dawson, with a groan.

"How late did you stay in that pirate's game?"

"Too late."

"Cleaned out?"

"How do I know?" said Dawson, sitting down and taking his head in his hands.

Laracy, overjoyed at this answer, immediately searched among the furniture until, having retrieved the scattered elements of last night's clothes, he could assemble the contents of the pockets.

"Here, I say — three cheers! You're stuffed with bills, my boy. Lucky at cards, unlucky at love."

"Oh, shut up, Jap!" said Dawson glumly. "Can't you see I'm feeling rotten?" He hesitated. "Make my excuses at the office. I can't get down this morning."

"Something wrong, old boy?" said Laracy, his

round, untragic face assuming a look of sympathy which made it more comical than ever.

"I've made a mess of things, and I've got to straighten them out."

"Amy?" said Laracy, who was confidant to the little ills of his heart.

"I can't tell you," said Dawson, who suddenly concentrated all his anger on a cuff button which refused to be subdued, cursing it in a way to have won the admiration of a hardened stage manager.

Laracy installed himself on the back of an armchair, drawing up his legs, and looked solemn.

"Tody Dawson, for the two hundred and twenty-twoth time — cut it out! There's nothing in it, my boy. Are you going to fool away all your chances? Don't you know the game you're playing?"

"Oh, it's all right for you to talk, you unsentimental jellyfish," said Dawson, shaking off a collar which refused to button.

"Quite right — and watch where I land," said Laracy, not in the least offended. "My dear fellow, make love to them if you wish — bless their hearts, they're so grateful! — but don't go and fool *yourself*. Good Lord, has n't Irma trained you better? Don't you know the bunch you're playing with? So you think you're madly, hopelessly in love with Amy Forrester, do you — you great big calf?"

"Oh, Lord, I don't know!" said Dawson, adjusting a pink tie with nicety. "Don't ask me."

"Go down Fifth Avenue, stop at any hair-dressing parlor, and make love to the first wax beauty in the window," said Laracy crushingly. "You'll be better off. Buck up, Tody! Life's a long way to travel and there's a lot of bills to pay." For a moment he

was silent, impressed with this momentous truth; then he added solicitously: "Don't make a colossal ass of yourself! Why, boy, you've a chance right under your nose — a dozen fellows fighting for her! A dear little thing, that's ready to fall into your arms," he continued vehemently, evidently referring to some eligible young lady captivated by Dawson's accomplishments, for he added: "Make hay — make hay while the sun shines. This dancing craze is n't immortal, you know!"

"I say, you're consoling!"

"I'm giving you straight talk," said Laracy obstinately. "Well? No confidence this morning?"

"Can't tell you anything — now," said Dawson, looking out of the window.

"At your service," said Laracy, who saluted and departed.

At noon, Dawson, who had tried fifty ways to cheat the clock, descended to the street and bolted into a taxicab.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Dawson, any number?" asked the Buttons.

He flung out hastily an address in Sixty-fifth Street, just east of Fifth Avenue, glanced at his watch uneasily and began to rehearse the explanation he had constructed.

Arrived at the double-front Renaissance house which Andrew Forrester had sublet for the season, he passed through the iron grille and greeted Gregory with an appearance of nonchalance.

"Morning, Gregory. Let Mrs. Forrester know I am here, will you?" Then, with the knowledge of an habitu  , he ran lightly up the winding marble stairs and into the great *salon*.

"The old boy must be making piles down in Mexico," he thought. "Awkward situation! Might be better to blame it on the punch!"

Finally, he determined to guide his apologies by the attitude he should encounter. Instead of Gregory, Morley, trim and stately in black and white, brought him in his answer.

"Mrs. Forrester's very sorry, Mr. Dawson, but she asks to be excused this morning, sir."

"What?" he said, his expression turning blank. Morley repeated the message.

"She won't see me," thought Dawson, so utterly upset that he forgot the presence of the maid, who watched him with a sympathetic smile. "She refuses to see me," he repeated, and he thought of all the good times, the dinners, the impromptu dances, the invitations to theater and opera, which had been his in these pleasant, luxurious pastures.

"You might write a word, sir, if it's very important," said Morley softly.

"What? Oh, yes!"

He passed hurriedly into the library, found an envelope and wrote in a bold hand, "Mrs. Forrester." He studied it, finding it absurd to have written anything at all, thought a moment, took out a card, and scribbled a few words on it, sealed the envelope, making sure that the gum had dried sufficiently before entrusting it to Morley.

"Wonder what she thinks of all this?" he thought all at once, and he hastily said aloud, "It's about the Versailles fête, Morley. We've got to decide the costumes right off."

"Yes, indeed, sir," said Morley blandly. "If you'll wait, I'll bring you Mrs. Forrester's answer."

"You're kind, very kind, Morley," he said nervously. "Thank you." He went to the piano and began to thunder out the latest maxixe.

"No; that does n't sound right!" he said, stopping short. He considered gravely, and then allowed his fingers to wander languidly through a sentimental ballad of the Parisian cafés, which struck him as better suited to his state of dejection and repentance.

II

AT the moment of Dawson's agitated arrival, Mrs. Forrester, in the Louis XVI boudoir, fresh from the hands of her hairdresser, was reclining in a deep-cushioned *bergère*, enveloped in a negligee which rivaled in delicacy the rare brocades and the dainty *cartouches* of Boucher which enlivened the walls hung in blue silk. Miss Pound, the housekeeper, had departed with the instructions for the day, leaving her to her reflections. Her nature was too amiable and gay to give in to violent depressions. Yet this morning she was annoyed — by the steady contraction of her eyebrows and the little furrowed lines of her forehead which had not been there two years ago. For this unusual and unwelcome mood there were three reasons — a letter from Andrew which lay in her lap, a marked copy of the latest *Tattle-tale*, at which she was glancing with a sensitive aversion of her little nostrils, and, last of all, the annoying problem of Tody Dawson.

The letter from her husband had arrived several days before, postmarked from a town in northern Mexico — short, direct, complaining of his lack of news from her.

MY DEAR AMY:

Three weeks now without word of you — you really might do better than that. Internal conditions here are so bad that I look forward to the

future with great apprehension. I spoke to you of this, and I thought I had made you understand the situation. Last month's account, just received from Miss Pound, was therefore a disagreeable surprise. I may be up any time or not for months. Please treat as serious my plea for economy. If the revolution spreads, the mines will have to close indefinitely. You may realize what that means to us.

Aff.,

ANDREW.

She had been overwhelmed with remorse on receipt of this letter, the first in which he had shown a touch of criticism. She was astounded and incredulous. There must have been some mistake. Surely she had written at least twice a week. But on consulting her engagement book, the mystery was easily explained. The last weeks before Lent had been absolutely crowded with social duties — four costume balls, half a dozen large dinners at home, every night consumed until three and four in the morning, luncheons, *thés dansants*, week-ends at Irma's or Gladys Challoner's, impromptu engagements at restaurants, with barely time to sandwich in a few hours' necessary shopping before the exactions of a social afternoon. Only the mornings remained, but when one woke at eleven, what with the *masseuse* and the hairdresser, where was there time to do the things one really wanted to do?

Nevertheless, she had reproached herself at her neglect of Andrew, who was working so hard, and had resolved that she would write him religiously three times a week — a long letter each Sunday morn-

ing and a short note on each Tuesday and Friday. As evidence of good faith, she had taken up her engagement book and written across the dates selected, "Write Andrew." She had even addressed and stamped a dozen envelopes, so that in hurried moments half the work would be done. Furthermore, she had called in Miss Pound and, assuming a severe manner, had said:

"The bills last month were simply ghastly. We must economize this month."

"In what way, Mrs. Forrester?" asked Miss Pound, bristling up.

"In every way," she replied, and in order to cover her complete ignorance, and to show that she was minutely informed, she repeated firmly, "In every possible way!"

She had not the slightest conception of their situation. At first, when they had sublet, at twenty thousand dollars the season, the little palace they occupied, she had been aghast at the sum. But Andrew had laughed and told her not to worry. She had such confidence in Andrew. There was nothing he could not do if his mind were made up. Why then, all at once, this bolt from a clear sky? Yet the ominous note of his peremptory warning remained in her memory. For there was the Versailles fête which she had planned all season — the fête that would be a social milestone in her triumphant season. The cards had been out five weeks — how was it possible to recall them? And the fête would cost — what all such important events must cost.

Andrew's letter had arrived just after luncheon, while she and Irma Dellabarre were waiting for the household pets, Dawson and Laracy, to call for them.

"My, what a frown!" said Irma, over her coffee cup. "Bad news?"

"Bills," said Amy blankly. To those obnoxious words "duty" and "conscience" she had added a third specter in a sort of unwelcome trinity. "He's in a fearful temper about them."

"Is that all?" said Irma, with a laugh. "All husbands grumble at bills. It's quite an art in knowing when to present them."

"I'm horribly worried," said Amy penitently. "You know there's the Versailles fête. Have you any idea what such things cost?"

"Don't worry, my dear," said Irma consolingly. "It's not a question of money. You know what they say in the Street — You don't? They say Andrew's cleaned up a million in Osaba Mining this year. No, my dear; I don't think it's money."

"But what, then?"

Mrs. Dellabarre stirred her cup, meditating; then she raised her eyelashes slowly, and a faint smile touched the corners of her lips as she looked at her friend.

"When a husband is jealous, he begins by complaining of the bills."

"Andrew jealous!" said Amy, astounded. "Why should Andrew be jealous?"

"Well, you have had quite a following."

"Of course, but he — he is proud of that."

She had had more than the usual amount of attention and admirers, more than Gladys Challoner, even. There were a dozen youngsters of the "crocodile" class who worshiped her mutely, and blissfully ran her errands. There were several foreigners who made love to her covertly, and a dozen other men who flirted with her in a conventional way; but, so far, she could

face her conscience — for she was certain she had a conscience — and truthfully proclaim that no one man had been promoted from the ranks or acquired the right to believe that she did more than gratefully tolerate his attentions. As a matter of fact, she assured herself (and the answer seemed crushing) that to be forced to devote herself to any one man would bore her to death.

"Irma, how absurd!" she said, with the rising inflection. "No, no; that's one thing I'm not worried about. I may be thoughtless and extravagant — I suppose I am — but I have n't given him the slightest cause for jealousy — not the slightest." She hesitated, glanced at the letter again, and said, "Well, now, have I?"

"The Count de Faucouleur?"

"A foreigner, and besides —" She started to confide, but bit her lip. "Well, who else?"

"Frank Payson."

"Ridiculous!"

"Britton."

"Irma!"

"Then, of course, there's always Tody."

"And Jap and Charlie Pardee and Phil and Harry," she interrupted impatiently, "and the whole kindergarten; Irma, you don't call them men!"

"I know and you know, but does Andrew know?"

"But, my dear," said Amy, in helpless virtue, "it's just because I am surrounded by a lot of foolish, harmless boys that Andrew should feel safe."

"And you have never had any trouble with them?" said Irma, watching her. "Now — honestly?"

Mrs. Forrester opened her clear blue eyes in unaffected amazement.

"Never! How funny to ask that! They know my principles. They would n't dare! The only time" — she stopped, and then continued — "the only time I had to do — well, a little disciplining, was with de Faucouleur, and that was really no trouble at all."

"Ah, I was sure of it! Do tell me all."

"There's nothing much to tell. After I met him at Gladys's, he started in to make violent love to me — as a foreigner will do, you know — and — well, I made him understand — oh, very kindly — that I was devoted to my husband. I told him that American women were splendid pals and loved a spree, but that they were not women of light morals; he might find exceptions, but, for the most part, despite a little harmless flirting, we intended to remain virtuous wives." Two years before she had smiled over the same characterization by Irma, but no troubling memory returned to disturb her righteous gravity. "He understood — oh, at once! He was very nice about it. He apologized for having — well, for having made a mistake. Now he is one of my most devoted friends, and I know he respects me for my honesty. Yes; I'm very proud of the way I handled him," she added, with a toss of her head.

"Foreigners don't always understand our point of view," said Irma meditatively. Then, as she was blessed with a sense of humor, she added, "nor some Americans."

"You can't help men falling in love with you," continued Amy, still studying the letter. "That's their own affair. But I play fair. No; I certainly have nothing to reproach myself with on that score."

She picked up the letter and examined the way in which her husband had signed himself, "Affection-

ately," which had been abbreviated to a rapid "Aff." She found it depressingly mechanical, matter-of-fact, businesslike, and lacking the true savor of romance. She had grown more beautiful in a dramatic way, all her charms under nice control directed by a sure instinct for values, but when her face relaxed into repose, there was a difference. The unconscious pleasing that had once hovered there like the fresh fragrance of a flower was gone. Instead, there was a driven wakefulness, an interrupted excitement of the emotions, and an impatience for the next sensation.

"Mr. Dawson and Mr. Laracy," said Gregory, entering.

"Oh, the boys? Send them up," she said eagerly.

Dawson and Laracy had come to escort them to the dressmaker's, where their manly criticisms would be invaluable.

III

THEY formed an animated and noisy group in the gray-hung salons of Franceline's, who at that time enjoyed the custom of fashion because she had the genius to perceive that her clients preferred to pay five hundred dollars for a dress which she could sell them with profit for half that sum. Ahead was a little raised stage with subdued footlights. From time to time, the silver-gray folds at the back parted. A graceful model emerged, posed like a preening peacock, descended the steps, and floated slowly among the spectators with mincing steps, her arms extended with feathery languor, her head pillowed against imaginary cushions, a vacant smile painted on an exquisite face. Franceline herself, as an extraordinary concession, stood in critical inspection, explaining to the group, detailing descriptions, encouraging the flip-pant criticisms of Dawson and Laracy, flattering their judgment, ever watchful for the first covetous glance in the eyes of the women. Tody and Jap, thus skilfully directed, passed from criticism to enthusiastic appreciation. From time to time the glance of a model — Betty or Priscilla or Lois — rested on them in discreet recognition.

"I say, let's have another look at that Callot negligee," said Tody, who knew the Paris dressmakers *en connoisseur*, and could name a model as unerringly as an expert distinguishes the parentage of a painting. "Irma, you must have it! It's the line you like. I

say, let's see it again. I mean the one the tall blond girl's got on. What's her name?"

"Hypocrite!" said Irma, under her breath. "As though you were n't old friends!"

Amy, who had still a great ignorance of the ways of young men of fashion, looked around in frowning incredulity.

"Why, Tody, you don't mean —"

"Amy, you are innocent!" said Irma, shrugging her shoulders. "To-night they may be all dining together and imitating us."

Tody, who knew Amy better, protested his innocence so volubly that she began to have doubts. The suggestion pained her. She did not like to think of Tody and Jap, whom she admitted to her intimacy, frequenting the company of such dangerous sirens. She resolved at the first opportunity to learn the truth and deliver the lesson. For, above all things, she intended to exert a good influence. But the return of Priscilla in the Callot negligee drove such virtuous intentions from her mind. She coveted the gown because she knew Irma wanted it and was hesitating at the price.

"Yes; it's too dainty for words," said Irma, with a sigh. "If I had seen it a month ago —"

"It's just arrived — the newest thing," said Franceline quickly. "And what is one more negligee to Mrs. Dellabarre?"

"Now, Franceline, you know perfectly well that I've had three negligees here this spring," said Mrs. Dellabarre, in a voice which carried to the farthest group, "and that's quite enough. Don't tempt me. Take it away — this instant!"

Amy had set her heart on its possession from the

moment she had seen the desire in Irma's eyes, and the moment of indecision made her tremble. She had come firmly determined to remain a spectator, steeled to resist the craving for beautiful things which had become a daily necessity in her existence. Since she must economize, she had resolved to begin at once. Her resolution held while the dainty, exquisite treasure passed her once; she resisted when a second time Priscilla, who had her own coloring, floated by, but when a last time, summoned by Tody, the model approached, she held out no longer. From behind Irma's back she sent Madame Franceline an imperious signal, which that astute reader of unspoken thoughts at once comprehended.

"There's a newer style coming over next week," she said, with a signal to the model to retire, "which I think will interest you more, Mrs. Dellabarre."

Amy felt very guilty. At her first attempt to economize, she had stumbled.

"Oh, dear, I wish I was n't feeling so poor," she said artfully. "I must have some things, but I don't know when I can pay you!"

Franceline was full of sympathy.

"Mrs. Forrester, you know I never send in bills until it's convenient — there won't be any trouble about that." And she added solicitously, "You must n't deprive yourself — for a trifle like that."

Amy Forrester drew a sigh of relief. The bill — and it was a large one — could go over into the fall. All her spirits returned. She felt she had accomplished something — something concrete.

"Me for the panier every time," said Jap, smiling appreciatively at a dark-haired little model who came up on tiptoes, dainty as a Watteau shepherdess.

Tody Dawson disagreed immediately, and the conversation became heated.

"*Panier* nothing! That's nothing but a lot of side-saddles stuck on. Wake up, Jap; wake up! The art of being well clothed is all in the descending line."

"You're for the wet bathing suit."

"Certainly. The human figure is beautiful — why distort it? Interpret it. I'm for things that wind and cling. All this other stuff is just a lot of icing on the cake, the bump on the log. It's grotesque; sure it is — artificial!"

"It depends on who's inside the *panier*," said Jap, with an appreciative look at the black-haired Betty, who turned slowly before them. "It all comes down to this: there ought to be two styles, one for the dump-lings and one for the string bean."

"Speaking of dumplings," said Tody, rising with a welcoming smile.

Kitty Lightbody came rolling in, her china eyes sparkling with excitement.

"My dear, am I late?" she exclaimed, making for Amy. "I suppose I am — hello, boys! — but Lulu kept me to show me it — My dear, have you seen it?"

"Seen what?" said Amy, vaguely alarmed.

"This week's *Tattle-tale*! My dear, you have n't! You'll be furious."

"Hush, Kitty; don't shout so!" said Amy, glancing about the room uneasily. "What do you mean? Is there something about me in it?"

"Something! I should say there was, and a nasty slap, too," said Kitty, in her reverberating voice.

"At me?" asked Amy, her heart sinking before the dread specter of publicity. "But why? What? I don't understand."

"Oh, no names mentioned. It's not so bad as all that," said Mrs. Lightbody hastily, at sight of her friend's pale stare. "We're all exposed to it. Haven't I been torn to pieces? Well, I should say I had! It's outrageous such papers are allowed to exist," said Kitty, who read it religiously. "Trouble is, people always believe what they want."

Amy got up heavily, her cheeks burning before the curious glances which Kitty's volubility had centered on her.

"I think I'll go," she said dully.

"I'll come too," said Irma, with a withering glance at Kitty Lightbody. "Really, Kitty, how can you be so stupid?"

"Suppose I am a fool," said that simple lady, with labored contriteness, "but I was so excited."

They hastened down to the car, stopped at the nearest news-stand and bought a copy. To Amy's unquiet imagination, even the little, weazened news-dealer who served her seemed to divine the awful truth. She opened it with a faltering hand and found the passage.

One of the most destructive of our young matrons is Mrs. Andrew B. Forrester, whose coming Versailles fête is expected to be quite the hit of the season. Amy is nothing if not discreet, as many of our gilded youth have found to their discomfiture. The number of scalps at her twenty-two-inch belt is said to have gone into the third dozen. Mr. Forrester is kept busy in Mexico.

"Oh, is that all?" said Irma, with a disappointed laugh.

"'All!'" echoed Amy weakly.

The malicious little paragraph danced before her eyes. She sank back. It was her first experience with the pointing finger of public curiosity. She felt overwhelmed, bruised, soiled.

"Irma, is n't it awful?" she said, in a whisper. "What shall I do?"

"Do? Laugh at it!"

"Laugh? How can you say that? I feel like sinking into the ground."

"Don't be absurd!" said Mrs. Dellabarre, amazed.

"Every one has to face such things. Have you any idea who could have done it?"

"I? Of course not."

"The worst is, it might be any one. After all, my dear, there is nothing so terrible."

"'Terrible'? It makes me out a professional — I don't know what — a professional coquette, a vulgar flirt taking advantage of her husband's absence." Irma Dellabarre looked at her silently. "I'm ill over it. I simply can't come to dinner to-night. I just could n't face people!"

"Don't be a goose! That *would* make talk. Oh, there'll be worse than this, but when you've seen your name in print a dozen times, you won't mind at all."

"It's terrible!"

"But it's over in twenty-four hours. Oh, it's not agreeable at first. But you must grin and bear it. Husbands take such exaggerated views. Lucky Andrew's away! Why, you foolish child!" she exclaimed, suddenly perceiving Amy in tears. "Here, this won't do!" She leaned forward, seized the speaking tube and cried, "Bingham, drive round the park."

At the end of an hour Amy had somewhat regained her calm. She had an engagement at Lazare's for tea. She protested she would never go, that she could n't go, but Irma laughed her into it. Nevertheless, her entry through the crowded room was the most painful thing she had ever done in her life. She felt her face go red.

Every group whispered her name as she passed, and mocking eyes grew about her like daisies in a field. Yet half an hour later she found that her breath came painlessly and she was able to jest over the incident with Laracy, saying,

"Look out; there is still room on my belt!"

Inwardly there remained certain qualms. The dinner that night bored her, the theater bored her, and when they gathered at the inevitable dance-club at midnight, she pretexted a headache to explain her somber mood, which was so unusual as to be remarked. For her success lay not alone in the rare distinction of her beauty, but in that she was young in pleasure. Her capacity was genuine and insatiable. When she was of the party, she communicated to all her radiant spirits, her tiptoe excitement, her ardent gaiety, and this spontaneous quality of enjoyment, amid the counterfeit youth and laboring pleasure, was rare enough to make her a valuable acquisition.

By two o'clock, she could stand it no longer.

"Tody, be a dear boy; call my car and take me home," she said.

"By George, I'll cowhide the cad who published that!" said Dawson wildly, somewhat overexcited. "I will, too, if you say the word."

"It is n't that," she said glibly. "That's too ridiculous to worry about. All the same, you are a nice

boy to say that. Get my car now and don't say anything. I'll slip away."

In the car, her doubts returned uneasily. She drew back into her corner, her chin against her palm, a little frown on her forehead, quite oblivious of Tody, who was rattling on with loosened tongue.

"Have I really done anything wrong?" she asked herself. "I don't think so. Did n't Andrew himself tell me to play all I wanted?"

She had played, and that was all, as all her friends were doing, and much less than some she knew. They made the pretense of being virtuous wives, but many laid themselves open to gossip — notably Gladys Chaloner. She herself had attracted certain men deliberately, one or two for the pleasure of infuriating Gladys or Irma, but she had lain down her laws and permitted not the slightest deviation.

"I can't help men being devoted to me," she repeated stubbornly. "That's their look-out. I play fair. No one could have been more honest, more careful than I have. Men respect me."

She had worked herself up to this state of moral complacency when abruptly, out of a clear sky, she heard, through the maze of her own thoughts, Tody Dawson calling her name, and the next moment she realized that he had caught up her hand and kissed it. At first she was too amazed to move.

"Tody!"

"Amy, Amy — have n't you known it — have n't you seen — Good God, I can't hide it any longer!" he cried wildly, still clutching her hand.

She understood. She sat up, looking at him in cold anger.

"Tody Dawson, how dare you do such a thing?"

Frightened at her tone, he dropped her hand and began to stammer out confused, incoherent protestations.

"Amy, don't be too hard on me — if you knew, if —"

"Tody Dawson, be quiet!"

She seized the tube and brought the car to a stop.

"Now, get out!"

He caught one glimpse of her stern face, and obeyed with clumsy haste. The silk hat he wore crashed against the door and toppled off. He recovered it awkwardly and backed out on to the sidewalk, terrified at what he had done. She saw him standing in the rain, a ridiculous picture, hugging the crushed hat, on which drops had begun to glisten.

"Now drive on."

She had acted swiftly, without reflection, without thought of what Bingham would read into this brusque, humiliating dismissal.

"Perhaps it was a mistake to take him so seriously," she thought, instantly apprehensive — the Count de Faucouleur had done as much. "I should have shamed him by laughing at him."

What had doubled her anger had been the malicious conjunction of circumstances. Was there some right to criticism of her conduct? She went to bed, a prey to nervous, racing doubts, saying to herself again and again,

"But what do I do that men can make such mistakes?"

IV

HER anger had dwindled to annoyance at the ridiculous side of the adventure, and her annoyance to unease, by the time Dawson had been announced. She hesitated before refusing to see him, for she realized that there must be some readjustment or the broil would become public, and conclusions would be drawn which would be disagreeable, especially after the public reference she had received. Nevertheless, he should have telephoned before claiming admittance at such an hour. She excused herself without explanation.

When Morley returned with his note, she took it eagerly, frowning yet relieved, for she sought a way to close the incident. She tried the edges, to make sure they had not been tempered with, composed her expression, and read the jerky scrawl.

You must see me. I'm miserable; I must explain, or I don't know what I'll do.

Further down, as an afterthought was added,

You can say it's about the costumes for the Versailles fête.

"But that's true, we must decide," she thought immediately. "How could I have forgotten that?"

The Versailles fête which she had planned was quite the most important event of her whole life. There were a hundred details to settle, decorations, costumes, music, lighting, but above all there was the

minuet of honor, which she was to dance with Dawson, Gladys Challoner, and young Pardee.

"I simply can't give that up," she said miserably, and this last eventuality seemed to her the crowning burden of her successive misfortunes. "How silly of Tody to spoil everything by acting like that! What *am* I to do? And everything is announced."

The more she considered the scrawled note, the more the question of the ball emerged from the background and dominated the situation. There was absolutely no possibility of replacing Tody Dawson, who danced like an angel, according to modern conceptions of a celestial paradise.

"Yes; I must see him. I must see him if only to find out what I have done that he could misinterpret. Yes, that's it," she said, relieved at having acquired a nobler reason than her own personal need. "I must know — in order not to make another mistake."

She turned to Morley.

"Tell Mr. Dawson I can see him for ten minutes."

"Down-stairs, Madam?"

She reflected. There was a morning room off her apartments which would not be exposed to busy ears.

"No, in the little gold salon."

When Dawson came stumbling in, head hung and plucking at his glove, she was waiting by the piano.

"No; leave the door open," she said, as Morley started to close it. For a door that is closed is a door with excellent ears.

The maid's footsteps died in the corridor. All that he had rehearsed fled from his memory. In two years, the girl with whom he had danced, flirted, and played had assumed authority and poise. He felt like a schoolboy caught in an absurdity.

"Good heavens, if I say I was tipsy, she'll never forgive me!" he thought.

"Well?" she said, in cold interrogation, without relaxing the forbidding stateliness of her pose.

"I can't explain," he said, dropping into a chair and taking his head in his hands. "Amy, I'm wretched. I would n't have offended you — you of all the world — Good Lord, I'd cut off my right hand first."

"Is the boy really in love with me?" she wondered, and she added more gently, "but you *must* explain; you owe me that."

"I can't; it'll only make it worse," he said desperately.

"But what have I done; what mistake did I make?"

"You? Good heavens — you! What do you mean?" he said, looking up terrified.

"What I can't understand," she repeated firmly, "is where I've been wrong."

"You? Good Lord, Amy! Are you crazy?"

"My dear Tody," she said quietly, resolved now to treat him like a boy, "if you took such a liberty, what did you expect me to do?"

At this he looked so utterly crushed that she began to feel a little pity.

"Don't be too hard on a fellow," he said, getting up and walking to the window with real emotion; for in his effort to convince her of the depth of his passion, he had begun to convince himself. Men have flung away their existence on just such turns of comedy.

"I suppose he's in love with me, the romantic boy," she thought, impressed by a spasm which shook his shoulders. Nevertheless, as she was genuinely concerned, she repeated:

"Well, what did I do wrong?"

"Good heavens, Amy, be human, have a heart," he said, lapsing into familiar slang. "Do you think I knew what I was doing? Men don't do things cold-bloodedly. We sometimes lose our heads," he added bitterly, digging his nails into his palms. "But whatever you think — good Lord, Amy, you must n't think that I for a moment ever believed — you — you cared — that I meant anything to you — that — Oh, Lord, I don't know what I am saying."

He stopped and looked at her, and as he saw her standing before him, so near and yet so far beyond him, so radiant and so fragile, with all the art that she had absorbed, more precious than the luxurious setting which surrounded her, he felt like throwing himself at her knees and crying:

"Do anything to me — make your conditions — only let me see you, let me love you as before!"

Something of this flashed into his face, for her voice became like stone again.

"Tody, I am a married woman," she said quietly. "Do you realize that?"

"'Realize'? I don't realize anything," he said, swallowing hard.

"But what are we going to do?" she said thoughtfully, for while she believed in his devotion, as it was easy for her to believe in all men's attraction to her, she was not convinced that any devastating passion existed. She took him firmly by the wrist and made him sit beside her on the sofa, saying: "Now, Tody, I'm not going to take you seriously. We have been good friends, and I won't allow you to talk nonsense."

"What do you mean?"

"You know perfectly well," she said quietly.

"Now listen to me! At first, I simply made up my mind to drop you."

"Oh, I say — not that!" he cried, horrified at the cruelty of her tone as much as at her words — a tone which set before him all the absurdity of his pretensions and the distance between them.

"For I won't hide from you that you've hurt me terribly." She repeated firmly, "Terribly — for you see, Tody, I trusted you. That's the worst of it. I let you come here as one of the family. I felt you understood that we were the best of friends, real comrades, that I could call you up at any hour, go with you anywhere, and that I was under your protection. There are only four or five boys that I admit to my intimacy in the same way, never men whom I meet casually. For I won't be talked about. Particularly as my husband is forced to be away most of the time, I intend to be overcareful. That's why, when you spoke as you did about that wretched article, I was so touched."

"And I meant it—I swear I meant every word —" he began.

"So I believed, and yet the very same day —" She stopped, frowned. "Now that we are talking frankly — as we must — I'll tell you that I did believe you were devoted to me —" She hesitated a moment over the choice of a word. "Devoted — yes, in a chivalrous way, as a boy can be to a woman of the world without doing him any harm. Perhaps I was wrong, but I felt I was a good influence for you, that I really helped you — perhaps that was my mistake," she said all at once, stopping and questioning him with her glance.

"No, no," he said, and his eyes were perilously

close to tears; "you were right — it's meant everything to me. By George, you are an angel — if all women were like you!" He was walking back and forth, speaking in broken phrases that he seemed hardly able to utter. "I see it all. What a cad I've been! But it won't happen again. I'm not going to say what is n't so. You do mean the world to me. Oh, I'm not asking anything — only to forget — to go back — give me another trial, Amy!"

"Very well; we'll forget," she said, after a pause. "But — would n't it be better if you did n't see too much of me — for a while?"

"Oh, Lord, that's what I was afraid of!" he said, with a groan.

"Yet would n't it be wiser?" she said doubtfully, "and perhaps would n't it be better if we did n't dance together in the minuet?"

He could not answer. He walked to the door and then back to the window, struggling for self-control. He had been only lightly enamoured when he had entered, but now, before her sweetness and charity, he felt madly, hopelessly, head over heels in love. No woman had ever existed like her, so kind, so fine, so unselfish, so big-hearted.

"Listen, Amy," he said, at last able to face her; "Don't do that — don't! I beg it of you. If you really forgive me, if you're going to give me another chance, you won't insist on that. And besides, if we gave it up now, every one would know — suspect — don't you see?"

"Yes; that's the trouble," she said pensively. She studied him with a last hesitation. "Tody, can I really trust you?"

"Trust me? Good heavens, Amy, after the way

you've been with me? Don't you know what it means to a man to know a woman like you?"

"Very well; I won't punish you any further. We'll dance it together."

He seized her hand (he would have liked to have fallen on his knees before her) and raised it respectfully to his lips. Then he went out hurriedly, not trusting himself to say another word.

She felt the same moral satisfaction which she had felt after her explanation with the Comte de Faucouleur. She knew that he would never offend again. As for his feeling toward her —

"It won't do him any harm to be a little in love with me," she said with a smile, "better that he should be devoted to me than to some dangerous vulgar woman. I can be a good influence in his life, the very best."

As Tody Dawson went down the great stairway, his head swimming, his heart swollen, a dimness before his eyes, the doors below swung open. He looked down and recognized Andrew Forrester.

V

FOR a moment, before the unexpected vision of the master of the house, Dawson had an impulse to retreat blindly, in the desperate need to steady his nerves. Then he came down slowly, extending his hand, a hasty explanation on his lips.

"How do, Mr. Forrester?"

"Oh, how are you?" said Forrester, who gave him a short look, an abrupt hand-shake, and began to struggle out of his coat.

"We've just been practicing the steps for the minuet. Amy's going to be stunning."

"The what?"

"The minuet — the Versailles fête, you know."

"Ah, yes."

"We're counting on your being there."

"Kind of you."

Dawson felt that Forrester noticed his embarrassment and that being an intimate of the household demanded that he should say something more.

"How are things in Mexico?"

"What?"

"Conditions all right in Mexico?" he continued, shifting to the other foot.

"About the same."

"Staying long?"

"Don't know."

"Amy'll be surprised."

Forrester gave no answer. To Dawson the door

seemed miles away. He swallowed hard, mumbled something and departed, cursing the impulse which had made him tell an unnecessary lie.

Amy was content with herself. It seemed to her that even Andrew, had he been present, would have been proud of her. She knew that she was unwilling to punish herself by losing the boy's devotion, but she had handled the situation so firmly, if with kindness, that he could have no doubt of her loyalty. Moreover, she had gained in his eyes, and the memory of the new adoration she had seen on his face gave her a spiritual satisfaction which she thoroughly believed she deserved. As for the effect on Tody — at this moment in her life she was skeptical of the great passion of love which novelists harped upon and newspapers dressed up in sensational colors. To her, it was a question of propinquity, a comfortable sensation such as the emotion that made her seek strength from her husband; a logical thing, born of respect and admiration rather than of any uncontrollable passion. She had never known its fever, its anguish of desire, its obsessing specter, and she doubted its existence.

"It was the only sensible way to handle him — the dignified way," she repeated, glancing about the room. His card had fallen by the sofa. She picked it up smiling and was about to tear it up, when Morley rushed in.

"Beg pardon, madam, but Mr. Forrester is downstairs."

"Mr. Forrester!" she said, vaguely alarmed by the sense of precipitation in the maid's entrance.

"Yes, madam, I was passing in the hall and I heard his voice talking to Mr. Dawson. I'm certain of it!"

Below, the outer door slammed. She remembered suddenly that Morley was watching her, and angrily aroused herself.

"There must be some mistake — go and see," she said abruptly.

The maid departed. She was alone, Tody's card in her fingers. She noticed it, and started to hide it in the front of her negligee.

"No, no — I have done nothing wrong — why should I feel like this?" she said impatiently, her ear strained to catch the slightest sound. The next moment she heard the powerful fall of her husband's step on the stairs.

At the first glance into his face, she saw that he was angry as she had never known him to be before.

"Why, Andrew, it is n't possible!" she cried, going to him with outstretched hands.

"I was called up rather suddenly," he began, then his glance fell on her negligee, and he stopped short. The face, already set in nervous irritation, became all at once hard, concentrated, and bitter. Before this look she recoiled as though he had stepped out from behind a mask. In a prophetic flash, she saw what he might become if he should cease to love her, and, seized with horror, she cried, warding him from her.

"Oh, Andrew, don't look at me like that!"

He continued to look at her. His eyes blazed and the color went out of his face. He turned, closed the door, and said,

"I met that young Dawson in the hall." She was too overcome with the shock to her heart to comprehend what he was saying. She nodded, her eyes blurred with tears, wounded as a child is wounded. "And I have a second disagreeable experience to find



His glance fell on her negligée, and he stopped short.

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you in such a costume," he said, his eyes running over the soft negligee which wrapped her little body about as the wreath of some heavy incense. "If you choose to receive men at such hours in your private *salon*, I object to your dancing in a dressing gown."

"Dancing?" she said, startled back into attention.

"Exactly."

"You are out of your senses, Andrew!" she cried, and her modesty was so offended that her cheeks blushed in indignant reproach. "You don't think that of me! No, no; that is impossible."

"One moment!" He stood staring at her, his fingers playing like lean tentacles. "Do I understand you to say that you have *not* been dancing with Mr. Dawson?"

She drew herself up and faced him with a flash of anger.

"Certainly *not*!"

"That is rather more serious, then," he seemed to hear himself saying. Something roared in his temples; a rush of water closing over him. "Mr. Dawson himself, five minutes ago, told me that he had been rehearsing the minuet you are to dance with him!"

"He told you that!" she cried, aghast.

"Exactly that." He waited, torn by all the blinding forces of jealousy, his eyes never leaving her face. After a moment he said imperiously, "Well?"

She could not assemble her wits. She felt trapped, beating out her wings against a cage, convicted by appearances.

"But this is awful!" she thought, shrinking before the ugliness of the situation. "He'll believe anything of me, and I am innocent!"

"Well?" she heard his voice repeat.

She glanced down at the card which was crumpled by the action of her fingers — her fingers that were moist with perspiration — and she said slowly,

“If Mr. Dawson said such a thing, he told a lie, and a very stupid lie.”

The silence seemed endless before she heard him breathe a deep breath.

“That I believe,” he said carefully. “At least you have not forgotten your dignity and mine to that extent. Now, may I ask why Mr. Dawson should have felt it necessary to explain his presence here with a lie?”

“‘A lie’?” she repeated weakly, feeling the forces of circumstance closing again about her.

“Exactly — a lie.”

Before she could meet this new danger, the telephone bell rang. Glad of the opportunity to delay, she made him a sign and took up the receiver. It was Harry Fortescue, of the “Young Guard,” as Irma termed them. Nothing could have been more inopportune.

“Impossible, Harry,” she said irritably, “I’m lunching with Irma and Gladys. Some other time. I’m in a rush now.”

She put down the receiver, but hardly had she taken a step before the bell rang again. This time, it was young Pardee, who was to dance in the minuet — Pardee whose manner toward her of late had aroused Mrs. Challoner’s combative instincts.

“Lunching with Gladys at Lazare’s,” she said hurriedly. “Run in and see us there, and we’ll make an appointment. In an awful rush now, Charlie — can’t talk to you.”

These interruptions from young men whom he did

not know and whom Amy already addressed by their first name were not calculated to calm Forrester's irritation.

"If your social duties will allow you," he started to say, with cold, calculated phrase, but his anger boiling up, he burst out, "Well, come now; what have you to say?"

She had regained her poise. After all, it was quite simple. She would tell him the truth — everything as it had happened.

"I should have told you," she said, frowning at the effort this simple operation suddenly required. "I have had an unpleasant experience with Tody Dawson, but I have handled it in the proper way as you would have wished me." She hesitated, and then continued resolutely: "Last night, in the car, when he was taking me home, the boy forgot himself. I don't know why — he may have had too much to drink —" She hesitated, and recoiling before the whole truth, said, "He tried to take my hand."

"In love with you, of course."

"I don't know — he imagined he was, perhaps," she said reluctantly, angry at herself that she had paliated the offense.

"What did you do?"

"I stopped the car at once." With the instinct of a woman to appease a man who is jealous by the spectacle of his rival's humiliation, she added: "It was raining. I made him get out and I left him there, in the rain. This morning he came around and begged me to see him. I thought it was better to treat him as a boy to end the incident. I saw him and made him understand my loyalty to you. He is heartily ashamed, quite miserable, and I am sure that he has now only

the profoundest respect for me, your wife." She extended her hand abruptly, and offered the card. "This is his card."

He took a long moment to read it, and then tore it slowly to pieces with unsteady fingers.

"Good God!" he said, leaning suddenly against the table. In the last terrible moments he had feared everything.

She comprehended the torments of jealousy in his cry and forgave him on the instant.

"He loves me like that!"

She was ready to fling herself in his arms, to cling to him and be done with words. She hesitated. He had been totally wrong, she was ready to forgive, but it was only right that he should make the first advance. And her heart swollen, longing to be in his arms, she waited for the word she was certain would come.

"Well, we don't have to face that yet," he said heavily; then he stopped, looked at her quickly and said, frowning, "You say you taught him to respect you?"

"Absolutely."

"And yet he goes out and tells me a lie?"

"Yes; but —"

"Come, now; I'm not going to believe that. There is more than you have told me."

Her face betrayed her. Why had she withheld the whole truth, if only not to lose in his eyes? He saw her confusion, and all the happy horde of doubts shrieked once more about him. He put his hand to his throat and then looked away from her.

"Amy, I must know. On your word of honor, is what you have told me the truth?" He hesitated, and

added in almost a whisper, as though he too shrank before the test, "*All the truth?*"

She felt cold to her finger-tips, and in the palms of her hands the perspiration rose.

"It is dreadful — I am going to lie; I must lie, there is no other way out," she said to herself, even while calmly and deliberately she answered:

"Why, of course, Andrew — absolutely all."

"This young cub means nothing to you?"

"Oh, that — I swear it to you!"

"There is one way to find out," he said quietly. He stepped to the door and rang the bell. Morley appeared. "Send Gregory here."

"What are you going to do?" she cried.

"That is my affair."

"Andrew, you are in my house, before my servants — you won't do anything to humiliate me before them?"

"And I? Haven't I been humiliated before them?" he said sternly. "'Humiliate' — that's good! What do you suppose Gregory thought when he heard that young cub lie to me!"

"Andrew, be careful!"

"Exactly. I intend to be a little more careful about many things."

Before she could protest, Gregory came in, fumbling at the buttons of the duster he had forgotten to change. The butler's agitation fanned Andrew's fury.

"They know everything. They've already been talking it over! This is what it's come to!" he thought. Aloud he said,

"Gregory, in the future, when Mr. Dawson calls here, whenever it may be, neither Mrs. Forrester nor I are at home. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir — perfectly, sir," said Gregory, with a frightened look.

"That's all." And as the butler stood glancing from husband to wife, he cried, "Well, why do you stand there? Did n't you hear me? That's all, I said!"

Gregory backed out, bumping against the wall, seized the knob and closed the door with a crash.

"That clears the atmosphere," said Forrester deliberately.

Amy was in a conflict of two emotions. The further Andrew receded from her control, the more she felt a thrill of admiration at his masterfulness. But this sentiment was immediately brushed aside by the shock to her pride. A servant had been witness of this sudden superiority, which in itself fascinated her. She had received the greatest affront she had ever experienced. In this home, where her whim had been law, suddenly the man had stepped in and shown who was master.

"This I shall never forgive!" she said in a hard voice. In her everything grew cold and rigid, and, all at once, from the weak, passionate longing for his caress of a moment before, she felt a blind, uneasy revolt, a hatred, the same hardening of all her nature that she had been amazed to see in him.

"I am not through," he said, checking her with a gesture. "I shall assume that after what has happened Dawson will not appear at your dance."

"I shall dance with Mr. Dawson," she said slowly.

"I forbid you. Understand me, I forbid you!"

"And I tell you now," she cried, facing him defiantly, "now, after what you've done, I shall dance with Tody Dawson!"

"I think, when you consider calmly," he said sternly, "when you realize what such a defiance will mean — you will do nothing of the kind. What you do outside my house, whom you see, I cannot control; but here in my home —"

"It is my house as much as yours!" she cried indignantly.

"Quite true; but there is one obligation incumbent on you," he said sternly, "to see that my dignity is respected. When any man tells me a lie as to the motives of his *tête-à-tête* with you — he does n't come in here again."

"Andrew — I warn you, Andrew, I won't accept this," she said, in a choking voice.

"You must take the responsibility of your own decision then," he said coldly. He looked at her a moment and drew a clipping from his pocket. "I don't know whether you have read this pleasant reference to us. I have." And he flung on the table the unlucky number of the *Tattle-tale*.

"You don't accuse me —" she began indignantly, when as though the imps of ill chance were determined to overwhelm her with false testimony, for the third time, the telephone broke in. Their nerves were at the snapping tension. The metallic, shrill note was the last irritation to him.

"What — another!" he cried, with an ugly laugh. "So this is what it's come to!"

His hand went out in blind anger, struck the telephone and swept it from the table. With a crash it went rolling to the floor between them. She shrank back with a scream, throwing up her arm. He stood breathing hard, his lips working spasmodically. Then, with an effort, he turned and rushed from the room.

VI

“CAN this be Andrew?” Amy said to herself in amazement. Had the floor suddenly parted and Gregory appeared on extended wings, she could not have been more astonished. For two years she had never known her husband but as the most complaisant and tractable of men, unfailing in good humor, proud of her social triumphs, an inexhaustible bank to meet every caprice. Twenty times she had said to Irma:

“Andrew is the most perfect of husbands. He lets me do exactly what I want. He has absolute faith in me. Really, I think he adores it, the more men are attentive to me.”

And, all at once, without warning, this outburst, this arbitrary and violent climax of Dawson's banishment! She who had looked at other wives in superior pride had suddenly been overwhelmed with the ugly reality. The first quarrel had come, and with it the realization that here was a new man — very different from the adoring Andrew of the past — a will and a temper to be reckoned with in future, an anger that had left her cold with physical fear!

She stooped and picked up Dawson's card, now twisted into an unrecognizable shred, and the copy of the *Tattle-tale* which he had flung down. Then, noticing the telephone, she swept it up hastily. But no sooner had she replaced the receiver, than the bell took up its shrill clamoring.

For the moment, she was seized with the same violent desire to sweep it aside which had possessed her husband.

"Well, who is it?" she demanded angrily.

It was Tody Dawson.

She covered the receiver hastily and glanced about with a frightened look.

"Mrs. Forrester is out!" she said abruptly, and set the receiver down with a bang. Of course, he had telephoned to warn her of his break, but the boyish imprudence of the move increased her irritation.

"The worst is, I acted as though I were guilty," she thought, as she entered her boudoir. Her cheeks were burning with a dry, feverish anger. She repeated insistently, "No; never — I'll never forgive him!"

Her husband's room adjoined hers. She marched directly to the door, threw it open, and said sharply,

"Andrew!"

The room was empty. He had left the house. She came back, frowning and uneasy, vaguely alarmed at this disappearance, which her excited imagination magnified. What could she do? There must be some explanation — matters could not be left like this. She dressed, glanced at the clock, and hurried down to the waiting car.

"Why did I act as though I were guilty?" she repeated, frowning. "I even told a lie, a foolish lie!"

Yet it was impossible to forgive such a public humiliation — quite impossible! Then her anger veered to Tody. What had possessed him to tell such a stupid lie — to call up on the telephone, when her husband might have been there? Perhaps Andrew had overheard — there was a connection in his room — per-

haps that was why he had rushed away. Of course, if he was jealous, it did look terribly, with all those unfortunate telephone calls. Suddenly she sat upright.

"But Andrew himself told me to play all I wanted to — of course he did! And now he reproaches me!"

Why had n't she thought of that at the time of their quarrel? There was her answer — to him and to all the doubts which had troubled her conscience. She had done only what he had wished her to do. If she had unwittingly offended against appearances, he was responsible. Her innocence appeared to her so radiantly clear that she settled back with a deep sigh of content. When she saw him again, she would confront him with this defence. What could he answer? Absolutely nothing! So relieved was her conscience that by the time she reached Lazare's, she was in the mood to make excuses for what she had sworn never to forgive.

It was almost two by the buhl clock hid in the palms as she hurried through the antechamber, where the first person she ran into was Mrs. Dellabarre, who had been telephoning frantically.

"Really, Amy — when we are going to a *matinée* — this is exaggerating it!"

"My dear, Andrew turned up unexpectedly," she began glibly. "I just could not get away."

She was in the dining room, smiling to the right and to the left, making for a corner table which was always reserved for their special group. Gladys Chaloner's eyes were sharp and malicious; it would never do to let her suspect the quarrel. She was composing her expression when, all at once, she was thrown off her guard. At their table, where they had drawn up

chairs for a word of greeting, she saw her cousin, Fifi Nordstrum, and Monte Bracken.

She had known that he was returned from Europe. She had read of his exploits lately at Palm Beach, but in the long intervals since she had last seen him, the impression of their last intimate conversation had remained so vivid in her imagination that to happen upon him now in this odd conjecture startled her.

He arose at her approach. By the look in his eyes she saw that he did not at once recognize her, until, by Fifi's greeting, he could place her.

"Sorry to be late — husband turned up," she said lightly. "Why, Fifi dear, thought you were in Florida!"

"Just bobbed up," said Fifi, embracing her. "Go on, Monte. Monte is too delightful," she added, in explanation. "He has just been wiping up the floor with us, and Gladys and Kitty are furious."

"Monte is exceedingly personal," said Mrs. Chaloner frigidly.

"Rats!" said Fifi. "There are thousands like you, Gladys."

"But what's he been saying?" said Irma encouragingly.

"The most dastardly attack I could make," said Bracken, smiling. "If I had accused you of being uneducated, parasites, or immoral, that would be nothing! But I remarked that the New York woman did not know how to dress, and the row started."

"But, Monte, every one admits that we are the best dressed women in the world!" said Irma, in protest.

"There you go! What do you mean by best dressed?"

"What do *you* mean?"

"I mean dressed in perfect taste for every occasion."

"Oh, go on and attack us!" said Kitty.

"With pleasure. You dress for the street car as you dress for a ball. There is nothing progressive in your art — everything is thrown out at once. A well-bred woman in Europe who is well dressed is an artist. When she goes shopping, she goes shopping, and not to attract the admiration of motormen, bell boys and shop clerks. She would be offended by such attention. So she dresses not to be noticed. If she lunches in a restaurant, she does not offer herself to the vulgar stare of a crowd as she would to her friends in the shelter of her home."

"This hits me!" said Kitty.

"Certainly. But it does not distinguish you, my dear Kitty," said Bracken, laughing.

"Well, we overdress," said Gladys, shrugging her shoulders.

"Ah, but it's more than that — you don't comprehend that to be a woman is an art in itself!"

"Now you interest me," said Irma, nodding in approval, while each in turn, at this excursion into the only field which completely absorbed them, leaned forward expectantly.

"To charm always and unfailingly, a woman must understand the value of surprises. She should know how to admit a man progressively to her intimacy, and to make him feel that each approaching step is a privilege."

"Blessed if I get that!" said Kitty explosively, while Irma nodded thoughtfully.

"If you meet a woman in the morning, you do not wish to see her as she is in the afternoon. If you meet her in the afternoon in public, you ought to feel

that there is a final intimacy that she reserves for you solely in her own home. The trouble here is, you make no distinction between the admiration of the crowd and the tribute from the privileged friend. You are well dressed always, but — how shall I say? — you are well dressed as — ”

“ Say it, Monte! ” said Fifi, with her elbows on the table. “ As demi-mondaines are well dressed. ”

“ But why not? ” said Irma lightly; for the topic had now run to a favorite pose of hers. “ As for me, I say it frankly, I admire them! They are the only real women to-day. What they do they do well — ”

“ Irma! ” said Kitty, closing her ears with a pretense of being scandalized.

“ But I mean it! Why not be frank? ” said Mrs. Dellabarre. “ We do imitate them. Monte’s right. You do and I do. Don’t be foolish — of course we do! Don’t we fall over every little dancer or actress who turns up? Don’t we fight to have them at our tables, copy their dress, their hair, their slang? We do — only, we do it badly. ”

The conversation ran into distinctions which scandalized the ears of an out-of-town couple at the next table. For, at this time, Irma’s pose was a cloak of bravado which many women of society liked to assume in the effort to startle and astound.

Amy took no part in the discussion, hearing little that was said, yet if her mind could not concentrate on Monte Bracken’s argument, she had, as always, a feeling of his mental superiority. Her own perplexities, the sudden disturbance of her equanimity, the new struggle ahead which she foresaw must come with her husband if she were to regain her threatened supremacy obsessed her to the exclusion of all other thoughts.

In the air was the arrogant dominion of the New; fetish and tyrant of the sensation-craving crowd. Lazare's was the newest restaurant, with the newest orchestra and the newest dancing favorites to patronize their dance hall. A new style had made last season's dresses grotesque, a new lace-brim hat was the magnet of all feminine eyes. About them the conversation ran on the new plays, the new books, the newest pianist, and the newest scandal. Nothing could survive six months in the forcing heat of this social hothouse, where every luxury of the body was flaunted, where every sensation had to have novelty, where a brilliant, driven, pleasure-drugged society met in its search for the extraordinary, for the bizarre — for the thing that astounded. And she, Amy Forrester, had become one of them, as he had prophesied. How strange that Monte Bracken should bob up in her life at this moment! She was superstitious, as all women are in misfortune. There was something unnatural in this reminder of the past — a sign and a warning! Perhaps, after all, she was wrong — all wrong. From time to time, as he continued his bantering attack with Irma and Gladys, his glance rested on her with growing curiosity. What was he thinking? Did he remember? Once he spoke her name, slurring it — she was not sure but that he had called her "Mrs. Foster." If he remembered, there must be a touch of malice behind the amusement in his eyes.

"If a woman's unhappy, she's lazy," said Fifi, closing the subject in her downright way. She rose with a glance at her watch.

"I agree, and I escape on the word," he said, laughing at Kitty's militant expression. He turned deliberately to Amy, holding out his hand.

"I see you have just remembered me," she said.

"Not quite that — readjusted my memories," he said, smiling. And then, with that assumption of intimacy which never offended in him, he added, "Are you going to ask me to call?"

"Please — soon."

She watched him as he made his adieux. He had not changed much — if any. He had gained in authority — a trifle thinner in the face and under the cheek bones. He had the same easy bearing toward life, the same tolerant amusement in his keen eyes; and yet there was a new note which arrested her attention — a note of sadness, or if not quite that, of restlessness, of being unattached to life — a seeking for some intangible help, which she detected for the first time.

"What's this stuff about our being lazy?" said Kitty, who had been puzzled by the intricacies of the conversation.

"Now that we are alone," said Irma, laughing, "let's tell the truth."

"What — do you mean to say a clever woman can do what she pleases — that is, of course — you know what I mean."

The other burst out laughing.

"Flirt to your heart's content? Certainly," said Irma. "Fifi has hit it — we are just simply lazy. We take husbands for granted. If we'd give one tenth the time to managing them that we do to playing around — if we showed just as much cleverness with our husbands as with other men — there would be no divorces."

"Irma, you're a nice one to talk!"

"My dear, when Rudy flies into a tantrum, I blame

myself. Let's whisper the truth: any woman can do what she wants and keep her husband, if she is n't too lazy to try."

"Not always," said Gladys, "but, even then, with a little attention —"

"My Lord, I must be the limit then — I certainly can't do it!" said Kitty naïvely. "I tried, but it was an awful bore. Who wants a husband around all the time, tripping over your skirts? Just because you're married, you don't have to treat all men as though they were lepers!"

At this moment, a boy approached with a telephone slip for Mrs. Challoner, who took it, glanced at it, smiled, and rose to answer.

"I suppose you call that being clever," said Kitty instantly. "Gladys gets me. The number of men she can keep going without snarling the threads beats me!"

Several younger men came in and joined their table — Laracy, Pardee, young Fortescue, and, finally, Tody Dawson, who drew up his chair at Amy's side and looked unutterably melancholy and submissive, refusing to join the chorus of raillery which always centered about Kitty Lightbody's incursions into philosophy. Amy withdrew, too, from the conversation, a prey to her thoughts. The discussion left her heavy-hearted. Was it true that she, too, was coming to this light acceptance of marriage? She felt like crying out: "Wait, let me think it over! Give me time — everything is rushing so. It is n't fair — everything is being thrust upon me all at once!"

"Lord sakes, Amy, if you're pining for your husband as bad as that," said Kitty Lightbody suddenly, "fly to him! You're worse than a girl when she's engaged."

She roused herself hastily, defending herself with spirit against the laugh which followed.

"Speaking of engagements," said Laracy, "heard the latest? Fifi and Monte Bracken."

"Fifi?" said Gladys scornfully. "Fifi does n't count! Men propose to her out of politeness. Fifi's collecting engagement rings."

Irma and Amy looked at each other with the same impulse, the same question in their glance, and then uneasily away.

"I don't believe it," said Mrs. Dellabarre, frowning.

"Fact?" said Laracy. "They're together all the time."

"Well, if we want to get the second act," said Kitty, springing up, "time to be moving."

Amy, who had stopped to greet an acquaintance, was momentarily detained. When she reached the sidewalk, the others had gone; only Tody was waiting, ill at ease and dejected.

"I'm sorry. They did n't want to wait," he said contritely. "If you'd rather — I can take a taxi."

She frowned and stepped into the car, motioning him to follow.

"Now go for me," he said with a groan. "I deserve it, I know. I've called myself every name I could think of."

She was in no humor to spare him.

"Why did you do it? And before Gregory, too. What will he think?"

"I know; I know!" he said miserably. "I lost my head — like a double-barreled fool that I am!"

"But why say anything?" she said, exasperated.

"Good Lord, Amy," he said, surprised, "be reasonable! I had to say something."

"Why?"

"Well, you see — at such an hour —" He began to flounder, bit his tongue, and said desperately, "I had to give some explanation — really."

It came to her like a shock — as though unconsciously Tody himself were pleading Andrew's cause — that he, too, had realized that there was something undignified, something demanding an explanation in his presence under the conditions. She frowned.

"I suppose you told him — the real reason?" said Dawson slowly.

"Of course — there was nothing else to do."

"Oh, Lord!"

"You have made me exceedingly uncomfortable — exceedingly unhappy," she said. She looked at him, angry that such an inconsequential element in her routine of pleasure should have the power to trouble her intimate tranquillity. But she could not let him suspect the gravity of the situation, so she said, "If Andrew was n't perfectly wonderful, it would have been more than disagreeable."

"I'll do anything you say — I'll go to him myself."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," she said sharply.

"The whole thing is ridiculous — but it's over!"

Arrived at the theater, she hastened into the box. Despite all of Laracy's humor and the bantering of her friends, she felt too depressed to conceal her emotion. Their flippancy annoyed her, their humor was stale; their assumption of worldliness was ridiculous. She thought of Andrew as he had been in his anger — masterful, trenchant, and unbending.

"Good heavens, these are nothing but puppets!" she thought. "There is not one real man among them — and we spend our time fighting over them!"

At the close of the act, she rose, pretending a headache, and went home, refusing an escort. She waited alone in her bedroom, trying to read, listening for her husband's return. At six, a message came from the office that she was not to change her plans, he would dine at the club.

"He might have called me himself," she thought, staring at the wall. Even if she had been wrong, he might have made allowances for her — every one always had. Hurt, weak, and rebellious, she dressed and went to dinner, a stiff affair, new acquaintances, where she was bored and restless. At ten o'clock she left and hurried home, hoping to find him back. Since their quarrel of the morning, she had done nothing but compare him to the men she saw about her. The new Andrew impressed and awed her. And though at times she rebelled furiously against the tyranny of his uncompromising attitude, she felt little by little that this unsuspected strength dominated her. In half an hour of sudden authority, he had won more than in two years of lavish devotion.

"I will do anything for him," she said to herself, in a flood of emotion, "anything. I'll give this all up, if he really thinks I am wrong. I'll give up everything. I will go with him and lead his life, only — only, he must say he's sorry. I can't give in utterly. No; I can't do that!"

He had not returned. She went up to her room, slipped into a negligee and dismissed Morley for the night. It was almost eleven.

"He ought to be back soon," she thought, as she took up a magazine to tease the time along. But at the end of a moment she perceived that she did not know what she was reading.

"But he is wrong; he is wrong, too!" she said, dropping the periodical wearily.

In the house, not a sound could be heard except the ticking of the little clock on her table. Outside, the street had gone to sleep, too. At most, a distant whir of motors or the echo of a passing train grew, swelled, and dwindled into the silence of the night. She felt alone, abandoned in the emptiness, afraid as in her childhood she had been afraid of the peopled dark, with a weak, helpless feeling of playing with forces she did not understand. At midnight, she heard the heavy clang of the outer door, then his mounting steps on the marble stairway.

Would he come directly to her room? She held her breath and her pulse quickened. He passed. A moment later she heard the click of the electric switch as he entered his bedroom.

"He will knock in a moment," she thought, with her glance on the knob of the door, that, at times, seemed to turn slowly. "Perhaps he thinks I'm asleep." She rose and moved across the room, humming to herself, that he might know she was up.

"He'll come — he must come now!" she said, stopping, her hands pressed over her breast to still the flurry of her breathing. Minute after minute she stood there, waiting —

Should she go in? Could she make the first overture? Her whole nature rebelled against the thought. To do so was to admit her offending the greater. To make the first advance would be to renounce her old empire over him.

"No, no; he must be the first! He must!"

She stretched out her arms, and her lips moved with his name. He must know that she was there! If he

loved her, he must feel that she was calling him to her!

All at once she heard the click of the electric button, then the sudden groan of the bed.

"He won't come — he won't come!" she murmured. "He knows I am here, waiting, and he won't come!"

The room grew blurred before her eyes. She groped her way to her bed, fell on it, and buried her head in her pillow.

"He mustn't hear me. He shan't know how I suffer," she said to herself hysterically. Yet her wish was contrary to her thought. Only a door separated them. Despite all her effort he must hear her, he must know that she was sobbing her heart away —

In the morning, when she awoke heavy from a tormented night, the maid brought her this letter:

MY DEAR AMY:

I am leaving on an early train, and perhaps it is better so. It does no good to talk over an ugly situation. There are, however, several things I must say to you. On reflection, I feel that I was wrong in giving orders as to whom you might or might not receive in your house. It is your house — and, in the second place, it is impossible to live on the basis of force. I shall therefore leave you full liberty for your actions. You will realize, I hope, the full responsibility this entails. I shall await your decision.

ANDREW.

VII

THE express was running into the outskirts of Buffalo on the last lap of its journey to New York. Andrew Forrester, in a private stateroom, surrounded by magazines half read, three novels yet to be opened, and a drifting mass of newspapers which littered the floor, waited eagerly the moment when he could descend for a long, nervous tramping of the platform. He was returning home for a brief twelve hours, for which he would have come a few thousand miles, that his presence might be remarked at the Versailles fête of his brilliant young wife. A dozen times he had vowed to remain away, but, in the end, he had come. He had come grimly, because his pride was in question, and whatever his private misery, his vanity insisted on concealing it before the world.

A crisis had arrived in his married life, which had to be met. In response to his letter, Amy had written defying his authority, announcing her intention of dancing the minuet with Tody Dawson. He did not believe that she would go so far as this, but if she did, he would meet the situation as it must be met.

"Everything all right, Mr. Forrester?" asked Perkins, the conductor, an old friend, who never failed to stop in for a chat.

"Thanks, yes. Running on time?"

"To the minute. When are you coming out again?"

"Just up for over night, Perkins; back with you the day after."

"Up for that costume ball, eh?"

"Yes," he said, surprised. "How do you know about that?"

"My missis showed me something about it in the paper," said Perkins. "She keeps an eye on the doings of the Four Hundred."

"I see. Well, drop in after dinner and smoke a cigar with me."

"Thank you, Mr. Forrester."

He tipped his hat and went his mechanical way, a thin, chop-whiskered, feeble-voiced man of forty, with a sweeping nose and the Yankee's prominent Adam's apple. Forrester rang for the porter.

"Sam, get all the papers and any new magazines, and clear out this truck."

"Yassir, yassir, I sure will," said the porter, grinning from ear to ear with the certainty of fancy tips. He went out, hugging the discarded newspapers, which filled his arms and hid his shining black face.

"If she does what she wrote," said Andrew Forrester to himself, staring out at the squatter settlements which heralded the approach of the city; "if she does that, it means only one thing." He laughed an ugly laugh. "Andrew B. Forrester, what's the use of fooling yourself? It's all over long ago, and you know it. You might as well readjust things now — face things as they are." Their estrangement was not of an accident; it had crept gradually in, during the long months of his absence, fatuously devoted to his dream of putting her on an equal footing with the great ones of America. "Suppose you've only yourself to blame — but then, that does n't help matters. Good God, can't a woman have even gratitude — if nothing else?"

It is a popular belief that an American husband is the most indulgent in the world. In great measure this is true, but it is also true that he is the most susceptible to brusque rebellion. So long as his faith continues, his self-sacrifice is fabulous; but once convinced of ingratitude, and the revulsion in his nature has the force of dynamite. Andrew Forrester, in the direct obstinacy of his outlook on life, knew neither subtleties nor compromise. Black was black and white was white, and he comprehended no diluting shades. Out of the ardent impulse of his nature, he had consecrated his life to seek for her the precious gifts of pleasure. That was a fact. She had suddenly revealed herself as unable to consider his point of view, his business interests, or his dignity. Then she had announced her intention of flatly disobeying him. These were more facts. There could be no extenuation and no explanation. If the old attitude could be restored, it could only be by an unqualified recognition of the justice of his grievance. That there could be the slightest hesitation on her part in acknowledging this, once the question clearly put, had astounded him. There could be but one answer. She did not love him.

All this was clear and logical as a business proposition, but once arrived at the inevitable conclusion, he found himself wandering back into mazes of puzzled conjecture.

"But what have I done to deserve such treatment?" he thought wearily, going over the past. "What is it she can't see? Why won't she realize that I am the important one, that what I do counts, that if I am hindered, if I fail, she fails — but, oh, Lord, what's the use of hashing that over? We've

gone beyond that. It's a question of authority now — order or anarchy. If she's brought back that young cub, Dawson, if she intends to sacrifice me rather than him — well, there's only one thing to be done!" He fidgeted in his seat, retreating before an ultimatum. "Of course there's nothing wrong — she's not that kind. Yes; I know that — God, but once I was n't sure!" His blood leaped up hotly at the thought. For days he had been shaken with the hot insomnia of jealousy, ready to believe anything. Youth sought youth and the rapid gaiety of its own generation. He himself had willed it. The next moment he frowned, passed his hand over his forehead. "No, no; that's ridiculous. I must n't let my imagination run away. I'm making myself suffer for nothing. Whoa there, Andrew B. Forrester!"

He sprang up, searched in his bag for a cigar, and, the train running into Buffalo, descended. It was deep into the evening, and in the scurrying, flower-laden crowds was the scent of the full spring. He caught a newsboy rushing past by the shoulders and bought a newspaper, opening it to the day's reports of the stock market. Osaba Refining and Smelting had again receded a fraction on unfavorable news from Mexico. He crumpled up the paper and flung it on a bench, though it had visualized no more than he knew.

"Why the deuce should I be bothered with debts now, when I'm making twice what I did?" he said savagely. "Then, nothing bothered me from morning to night. I was in the pink of condition, could eat like a schoolboy, and work twenty hours at a stretch."

In two years he had trebled his debts. Since his marriage, luck had run persistently against him. He had played for the gambler's maximum, sold his solid

holdings, accumulation of years, to plunge into the new venture. Confident of golden horizons, he had taken large blocks of stock on margins. To-day, Osaba Refining and Smelting was fifteen points lower, despite the miracle of organization and development he had worked, despite the net earnings and the prospects ahead. By one of those tricks of fate which the American financier never foresees in his confident manipulations of destiny, a subordinate officer in Tampico had affronted the dignity of the American nation, and forty-eight hours later war hung on the horizon. Consequently, though his income was fifty thousand a year, he spent seventy and faced the possibility of borrowing a large sum in order not to sacrifice part of his holdings.

The thought of bills, large or small, had always annoyed him, and now, confronted with the specter of Amy's extravagance, he had begun to age. As he moved up and down, immersed in gloomy thoughts, his stride had lost its alacrity. Deprived of his morning gallop, he had grown soft and a slight *embonpoint* had arrived. Lines had gathered about the eyes and temples. His lips had a trick of twitching when his mind was perplexed, and day or night he found it increasingly difficult to relax.

"Well, if the cub's there — that'll settle it!" he thought again, his mind reverting to the approaching crisis. "Anyhow, in a few hours I'll know where I stand."

During the long isolation in Mexico, he had felt, with an increased heaviness of heart, the change in her letters. It had been not only their increasing rarity, but the growing note of complete self-absorption which had warned him of the widening chasm between

them. The only result of his self-abnegation had been to give wings to a butterfly, with which to escape from him.

Like most American men, he had married without the slightest contemplation of marriage. He had had no conception either of the new duties he should assume or what share of responsibility in this new attitude of life he would eventually demand from his wife. He had plunged in, without chart or compass. No religious training had prepared him, no home standards existed for the necessary background. The second period had now arrived, when he was to examine logically what he had done on impulse.

"But what have I done that was wrong?" he asked himself, as he had asked a hundred times. "Where have I failed? Given without asking anything in return? Perhaps." That was the tragedy of America, and the result was the same, whether it was the husband in his chivalry, sacrificing himself to the youth of his wife, or the parents, educating their children beyond them in the passionate American longing to raise those they loved above them. "I should have made her follow me. I suppose now it is too late," he said abruptly.

The incoming crowds surged about him, whistles shrieking in his ear, great volumes of heavy vapor blowing under the resounding roof. It recalled the first parting in the Grand Central Station, when, by some impulse of her deeper self, some ominous shrinking before the future, she had clung at his side and begged to go with him.

"How queer — how queer life is!" he thought, with a laugh of mockery. "There was one moment when everything might have been different — a mo-

ment when I would have let her — if we had been alone — just us two — if the others had n't been there! And if she had asked the next time —" He shrugged his shoulders. There had been no next time!

The whistle gave a shrill blast. Sam called to him in warning. He swung up the steps and returned to his seat.

"Well, here I am, and what am I going to do about it?" he said, sorting the new pile of periodicals and newspapers. "Face the music, of course. Other men have, and life goes on just the same."

Perkins came in after dinner, and he welcomed the interruption with a feeling of relief.

"Come in, come in, Perkins; here's your cigar — and it's a pretty good one," he said, extending the box. "Take a couple away for a good dinner when you get home. Well, what's your opinion on this little world of ours?"

The thin conductor selected the cigars with an air of veneration, pocketed two and bit a third, after pinching the end, in order to save the precious fraction.

"Thank you, Mr. Forrester; that will help a lot," he said, beaming with the feeling of good humor Forrester communicated to those who approached him. He brought forward a newspaper. "Notice this?"

"No, what is it?"

"Picture of your missus."

Forrester took the paper, drawing back and nodding gravely. Before him was the exquisite profile of his wife and underneath:

MRS. ANDREW B. FORRESTER

WHOSE VERSAILLES FÊTE TO-NIGHT IS AN EVENT OF
THE SEASON

"Yes; she is extraordinarily pretty," he said to himself, examining it critically. "Quite different from any one else." A thrill of pride went through him. "Is it possible that I am in love with her?" he asked himself anxiously. "That I can still be in love with her?"

"Quite a story about the ball," said Perkins admiringly. "Description of the costumes and all that. Guess every one worth while will be there, won't they?"

"You seem quite interested," said Forrester. He laid down the paper, pushing it a little away from him. This was a new side of Perkins—whose salary, whose struggles and perplexities and hopes he knew, as he liked to know the inner mechanism of all lives.

"My missus thinks a lot about such things," Perkins said apologetically. "You see, knowing that I know you, she's been specially interested in this. She says it's the most elegant thing this year."

A fantastic idea came to Forrester. What if he gave Mrs. Perkins the chance to gaze upon this paradise of her imagination? It could easily be arranged—all she would need to do would be to help upstairs. But immediately, looking at Perkins, he said to himself angrily:

"I must be crazy! Do him such an injustice? Not by a long shot!"

Out loud he said:

"So Mrs. Perkins reads the social column, eh?"

Perkins nodded gloomily.

"She's daffy on it." He blew out a fragrant cloud of smoke, and looked at Forrester inquiringly. "Mr. Forrester, what's gotten into the women folks these days?"

"Well, what do you think is wrong?" he answered defensively, startled at a question which came so close to his own perplexities.

"Search me," said Perkins, shaking his head. He started to continue the subject, hesitated awkwardly, and switched. "What kind of openings are there down in Mexico for a fellow like myself?"

"For you, Perkins?"

"Yes, for me. I've been wanting to make a shift," he said, looking at the end of his cigar with the gravity that one assumes with brass buttons. He tugged at his chopped whiskers. "Yes, Mr. Forrester, for a long time." He looked up quickly, deciding to plunge in. "You could n't use me somewhere, could you, Mr. Forrester?"

"Mexico's a long way off," he answered, studying him in surprise, "and just at present it's no place for women."

"I was n't thinking of taking the missus."

"Oh!" A silence rested between them. "Trouble of some sort?" said Forrester finally.

"Yes."

"Not in the family?"

Perkins began to play with the brass buttons on his uniform, clearing his throat nervously.

"Well, that's about it. I want to get away."

"Sorry to hear that," said Forrester, startled at the conjunction of circumstances.

"Mr. Forrester, what's got into the women folks these days?" the conductor repeated all at once, and Forrester, at a loss for an answer, replied again:

"Well, what do you think's the matter?"

"You can search me!" Perkins said, staring out of the window. "It was all right the first years, until I

got a couple of raises — until we settled in the city. Mr. Forrester, I think it's the dance craze's got a lot to do with it. It does turn their heads, particularly if they're young and pretty." He stopped, opened a pocketbook, and brought out a photograph. "Never showed you this, did I? Quite smart-looking girl, is n't she?"

"Very," said Forrester, glancing in wonder at Perkins' wife, who might have walked out of his own drawing-room.

"Some style," said the conductor, with a touch of pride.

Forrester nodded, pursed his lips, and handed back the photograph.

"You have to pay for what goes on that back, Perkins."

"Exactly — that's the point," he said slowly. "That's where we differ — one of the points. You see, I'm thinking ahead — there's a good ways to go still, and it takes a powerful store of nuts."

"Saved anything?"

"Six hundred in the bank — six hundred, that's all," he said wearily. He drew aside and nodded; then he sat up with a jerk.

"Only six hundred — at your age!" said Forrester, astonished. "Things been going pretty badly then?"

"Pretty bad, sir, yes. Oh, there's nothing wrong, you know, with Nellie. You understand what I mean."

"I understand," said Forrester, gazing out of the window.

"But her life and mine don't jibe. It's society's turned her head — all these political picnics and balls, the 'movies,' the friend with a car — and dancing every afternoon. I've tried to get her out of it. But

you can't budge her from New York — no, sir; not an inch! I'd a fine opening out in St. Louis with my uncle, in a wholesale grocery. But she would n't go."

"Perkins, why don't you divorce?" said Forrester abruptly. Then he drew back and stared again into the flitting hills, shocked at the echoes of what he had himself pronounced.

"Well, you see, there's a couple of kiddies," Perkins said gently, "and they're fond of her. So am I — in a way. You saw what she looks like. She's bright, always full of spirits. No; I would n't want to do anything to hurt her. But some one's got to think ahead — and that's me. I want to get away, Mr. Forrester, or I'll be losing my grip."

Forrester straightened up, drew out a memorandum pad and pencil.

"Write down your name and address."

"You mean — you'll find a place for me?"

"You bet I will!" he said emphatically. He spoke with decision. "You're a first-class, corking man, and I'm going to use you. Now, a few plain words. What's important — her life or yours? Who's the worker? Who's feeding the family? These things are hard — hard — especially coming to a decision. But make your decision, stick to it, and you'll feel like another man. She won't follow you? Make her an allowance and get out. You come to me to-morrow, when you've told her, and I'll take care of you, Perkins — and you won't lose by it, either. Is it a go?"

He held out his hand. Perkins took it slowly, swallowing hard.

"It's a miracle, sir, that's what it is — no use trying to thank —"

"Don't. I guess I can understand."

When Perkins presently departed, Forrester craned forward, arms on the table, hands drawn under the chin, held for hours in his own thoughts. Before, he had felt isolated by his own private unhappiness, now, a certain kinship in misery descended on him and eased the ache.

"Whatever happens, Andrew B. Forrester's not going to be wrecked, either," he said stubbornly. "I've gambled like a fool, I've gotten in beyond my depth. I've lived like a spendthrift. Now enough — she can go her way and I'll go mine, but her way is n't going to sink the ship!"

He was still in this belligerent mood as the train plunged into the long tunnel below Harlem. He rose and went out on the platform. A gigantic transformation was being worked; an immense system was growing around the shell of the old, layers of tracks being built beneath their roadbed, houses shored up, caverns opened, new supports replacing the crumbling rock, and all this myriad activity going on night and day, without a single minute's disturbance to the multitudes which flowed in and out.

"By George, that is great!" he said in awe. He would have liked to have lifted his hat in token of respect before the genius of his race, which stopped before no impossibility. "If I had a son, I'd like him to do big things like that."

But he had no son. He was alone.

In the station, that great underground sky-scraper, where crowds swarmed up from delving stories, the same joyful reverence filled him. It was all so immense, on a scale so much bigger than any human consideration. It was like a great purposeful tempest washing away little uglinesses.

"This is America!" he said to himself, at the sight of world-crowds that rushed about him. The electricity of the moment, the swaying toward the future, the regeneration of the old, tired strain, with the joy of great horizons held him in its grip. A throng of emigrants went past, from southeastern Europe, huddled together, gaping, ticketed for the West. "Out of these staring oxen," he thought, "a master of men may come. By George, this *is* America!"

He stood a moment, a long moment, breasting the human flood, a growing light in his eyes.

"Good Lord, what does my private grief amount to before this?" he said to himself. "I've married, not as I thought I did, as a free agent, but because nature, I suppose, sent me blindly out to seek a mate! Whether I'm happy or unhappy, what does it matter? This is what counts. Big days — and it's good to live in them. This is my life — my man's life — my part in the fight!"

VIII

WHEN Andrew Forrester reached his rented home, it was late afternoon. The sidewalk was crowded with supplies arriving from the caterers — cases of wine, tins of ices; box-trees and potted plants, wreaths of greens from the florist's; carpenters were carrying in scaffolding; others were erecting the awning, rolling down the carpet. When he picked his way up the steps through this straggling confusion, a heavy-set man in dark clothes barred the door to him.

"What business, please?"

"Just the husband," he said, with a snap of his jaw.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I'm from the agency. We have to be careful who comes in," said the detective, who continued, however, to watch him doubtfully.

"I see — and it's up to me to prove my identity," said Forrester, so brusquely that the detective retreated a step. "Well, there is a certain element of humor in the situation."

"I'm only doing my duty, sir."

At this moment, Laracy, hatless and coatless, piloting a barricade of palms which moved like Birnam Wood, perceived him and came up puffing.

"Won't shake hands, Mr. Forrester; I'm covered with grime. Lord, I don't know how we're ever going to be ready, but it's going to be a smasher!"

"Kindly recognize me as the master of the house to this model watchdog," said Forrester grimly.

"What! Oh, I say, that's a good one!" said Laracy, bursting into laughter. "It's all right, Jim," he added, with a wave of his hand, which satisfied the detective. "Excuse me, won't you? I'm overseeing the decorations."

"Thank you for the service," said Forrester, with an irony which was lost.

He entered the antechamber and thrust his way up through the bedlam to the *salons* and the ballroom, which swarmed with decorators and carpenters, tracking and purposeful stage-ants, under whose industry the scene was growing from chaos. Half a dozen young fellows whose names he did not know, commanded by his wife, were rushing in and out under the direction of Steingall, the artist, a short, electric man of enthusiastic rages, who was everywhere, drumming up laggards, rearranging, and directing. And the first person he saw, nonchalant, at home, thoroughly self-possessed, was Tody Dawson. The young fellow perceived him, wheeled, and came up with an appearance of casualness.

"How do, Mr. Forrester? It's going to be marvelous. Be back in a minute. I've got to telephone for more box-trees."

Forrester bowed without shaking hands. His jaw shut with a snap. The answer had come. He, the husband, was to be sacrificed. It struck him as sublimely ludicrous that he, Forrester, should be beaten thus by a youngster who was n't worth a clerk's salary.

"For she's beaten me," he said grimly. "I am the intruder."

Steingall, who was an enraged purist, stopped a moment in his breathless turning to explain. Everything would be Louis XIV., even to the paintings on the

walls which he had rented from the Caxton Galleries, and the ornaments and appliques from Bootheby's. The ballroom was to be transformed into an orange garden; the open windows and doors were to be boxed in and lighted by invisible electric lights, to give the impression of moonlight vistas; a great star-strewn canopy was to be let down from the ceiling to represent the firmament, while colored lanterns would twinkle among the branches.

"Very fine — very clever," said Forrester, nodding, without visualizing anything in the confusion.

He wandered into the dining-room, which was being transformed into a tent to represent a fair in the days of the *Grand Monarque*. In one corner, Pardee was passing on the liveries to be used. Steingall flashed in to approve of two little pickaninnies decked out in turbans and glittering red-and-gold costumes, who were to circulate with trays of bonbons.

"Mr. Steingall — Mr. Steingall — here are the electricians!"

The impresario disappeared. A little woman, smartly tailored, whose presence was unaccountable until he perceived she carried a notebook and pencil, approached Forrester, mistaking him for a *confrère*.

"Have you got the supplementary list of names?"

"Eh — what? No — not yet," he said, startled.

"I wish we could get some hint of the costumes. It's a corking story." And, with the instinct of the newspaper to make all things comprehensible in dollars, she added anxiously, "What do you imagine it'll cost the old man?"

The "old man" referred to him.

"That's just what I was trying to figure out," he said, with a grim smile.

"Well, I'm going to put down 'One Hundred Thousand Dollar Fête,'" she said excitedly. "When you work out what's going to be paid out in costumes and jewels, it represents about that. It's quite the most expensive event of the season."

"So I judge."

"Guess old Forrester can stand it, though. They say he cleaned up a million on that last break in Mexico."

"That's interesting."

At this moment, a businesslike young man with derby pushed back on his head, in spats and glaring waistcoat, smoking a cigar, whispered to Pardee and came over.

"Mr. Forrester, would it be possible for us to get a view of Mrs. Forrester's costume? We'd like to have it for the morning paper." Out of deference, he removed his hat and sheltered the cigar behind his back.

The dapper little lady gave a gasp of amazement but recovered quickly.

"Mr. Forrester! Oh, I beg your pardon — I did n't realize!"

"No harm done — it's good to hear about ourselves occasionally," he said, smiling.

"There are a lot of details you can give us now," said the young man, breaking in professionally.

"I'm afraid not. Mr. Steingall, Mr. Laracy will help you out," he said wearily. "I'm just out of the train. I know nothing yet — absolutely nothing. You'll excuse me."

He moved away, dodged a couple of workmen bringing in a great screen, bumped into and apologized to an electrician in shirt sleeves, grimy and smoky — the democrat unabashed in the palace of the rich —

and avoiding the leader of the orchestra, who was clamoring to Laracy for more room, went up the great marble staircase.

"Who am I in all this?" he thought ironically.

"Mr. Steingall — where is Mr. Steingall? Send Mr. Steingall up at once — *madame* is ready."

He looked up and recognized Morley hanging over the stone balustrade.

"You can announce me, too — if it's convenient," he said sharply.

Morley gave a cry of surprise.

"Oh, Mr. Forrester, we've been telephoning to the station — every one's waiting for you to try your costume on, sir."

Steingall went past him, two steps at a time, without seeing him. He went up more slowly, a prey to his own reflections. Mrs. Dellabarre, warned by Morley, came out to meet him on the landing, giving him both her hands in friendly enthusiasm.

"Andrew, wait till you see Amy! She's perfectly ravishing!"

"It seems like a madhouse," he said, unbending a little. He liked Irma. She understood him, he felt. Often he had thought of going to her in his perplexities. She was different from other women.

Mrs. Dellabarre drew her arm through his in the *camaraderie* which had been established between them and brought him thus into the morning room where, in a circle of dressmakers who were turning about her on their knees, he beheld his wife.

"Here he is at last!" said Irma triumphantly.

Amy looked up with a touch of confusion, not displeased to have this first meeting with her husband under the protection of other eyes.

"Andrew, dear, we've been frantic about you," she cried hastily. "Your costume is waiting for you."

She looked at him with a quick glance, ready to bury all resentment, but repulsed immediately by the irony she saw lurking in his eyes.

"I suppose I must go through with it," he thought, wondering if she would compel him to kiss her for the comedy to be played before others. "What am I?"

"You? You are Louis XIV, of course!" cried Irma. "Wait till you see yourself."

The little seamstress rose from the ground, intentionally releasing Amy. There was no escape. She stepped forward, offering her cheek.

"I'm a mass of pins still — I don't dare move."

"I understand," he said, and kissed her.

Steingall, who was surveying the costume with his head on one side, indicated a better draping over the shoulder.

"Of course, you can't judge of the effect until my hair is curled and powdered."

"It is very beautiful," he said quietly. He felt the falsity of his position. He, too, was masquerading. "I'll go now, I think, and try on my costume."

"Do you mind dining at the club," she cried, as he went toward the door. "And be here —"

"Certainly — but I shall see you before I go," he said.

Irma Dellabarre followed him out to the hall.

"Andrew!" He looked at her, and saw her eyes set seriously on his. "Andrew, whatever you do, don't discuss anything — well, serious — with her to-night. It's her night, her great night. Don't spoil it. Be careful."

"She has been talking to you, then?" he said, look-

ing away from her and over the balustrade at the stir and conflict below.

"Yes." She added, after a moment, "She is very unhappy."

When he reached his room, he burst out laughing.

Half an hour later, he heard his wife come into the bedroom and went in.

"How's the costume?" she said hastily. He noticed in her eyes, as they passed from his, a touch of alarm.

"The costume is all right."

Morley, at this moment, went out on an errand before she could think to retain her. They were left alone.

He waited, and she waited for the word of explanation that ought to come. When the moment had passed, he said deliberately:

"You have nothing to say to me, after I have come a few thousand miles?"

"I wonder why you came," she said, with a rebellious flash. His anger always awoke in her the instinct to struggle against his masterfulness.

"You wish to know? I'll tell you. I've come so that nothing should be said against you, as there certainly would have been if you'd given this fête and I had been away."

"And your name?"

"I have the greatest pride in my good name — yes."

"His dignity — he's always thinking of that! It is n't because he's jealous of me — I could understand that. It's just his vanity," she said to herself, though, in a calmer mood, she would have recognized the injustice of this.

A knock, and Morley appeared. The jeweler wished to know at what hour Madame would wish the necklace brought.

"Ten o'clock will be time enough," she said, a little confused. She explained hurriedly: "Case & Fontenelle are lending me a wonderful necklace to go with my costume."

"Lending?"

"Oh, for almost nothing. It'll be a great advertisement for them."

"I see. May I ask you to wait a moment?" he said, as she started to ring for Morley. "I have come quite a distance, and I am leaving early. May I have half an hour's talk with you — uninterrupted?"

"Now?" she cried, in dismay at the storm she felt powerless to avoid. "Now? Don't you realize I have a hundred things to attend to?"

"You are developing quite an executive ability," he said, exasperated by her attitude of evasion.

She understood the allusion, and a flash of anger showed in her face. Luckily, one thought dominated her: To-night she must be at her best. If she cried, her eyes would show it. At this moment a box arrived with the wig from the coiffeur's.

"You see!" she said reproachfully.

"I can wait," he said, going to a chair and sitting down.

Pignatelli, a stoop-shouldered little man, came in with profuse salutation. The trying of the wig consumed half an hour. She was so delighted with the effect that she gave a cry of delight.

"Exquisite!"

She felt herself so transformed, so radiant, that he, her husband, could not resist her; in his pride at per-

ceiving how beautiful she would be, his irritation must soften. But when she turned to him, there was the same obstinate reserve in his eyes which she could not comprehend. No; it was not human to act as he did.

Then, once more they were alone.

"Andrew, I'm in no mood to listen. I'm all wrought up," she said sharply.

"I regret it."

"What!" she cried, aghast. "You wish to make a scene now — at such a time?"

"Excuse me. It is n't I; it is you who have made an explanation necessary. I left the decision to you. You have sacrificed me to bring that young Dawson into the house."

"Dawson! Dawson!" she exclaimed irritably. "Always harping on that idiotic affair! Besides, he is n't here alone. He's here with half a dozen others — because I'm at my wits' end — because every one must help me."

"Good heavens, don't reason like a child!" he burst out in turn. "Face the situation; understand the gravity! Be at least a woman!"

She turned, feeling escape impossible.

"Well?"

"I have left the solution to your sense of delicacy, of loyalty, to decide; and you have done so."

"I have decided," she said definitely.

"What?"

"That I will not be bullied by you into doing unreasonable things."

"'Unreasonable'! You regard my request as that?"

"Exactly."

"In other words, you intend to go your own way, regardless of my wishes," he said, in his deliberate,

businesslike manner, which had the power of doing away with all her better feelings and arousing a blind revolt.

"That depends entirely on you."

"Your attitude does not surprise me," he continued slowly. "After all, Dawson is just an incident. How many others there are, I don't know," he said, with a shrug of his shoulders. "The crisis has been coming on for months. The trouble is that you are not interested in my life. You do not care in the least for my problems. I asked you to be careful of expenses — and this fête is the answer."

"Now that is how unjust you can be!" she said, two red spots standing out in her cheeks. "Who wished me to give it, who suggested it five months ago?"

"Then I was n't worried."

"But I could n't give it up after it was announced!"

"My dear Amy, you could do anything you wanted to — but you did n't want to. The trouble is, you don't love me."

"No; that is not the trouble," she cried angrily, for even at this moment she recoiled before pronouncing this tragic finality. "The trouble is that you are heartless and brutal, that you wish to order me about as you do one of your own clerks, that you have n't any pity on me — that you are thoroughly selfish."

"I, selfish!" he said with a laugh, that came back to him with its ugly echo. "That is too much. The truth is we've reached a point most marriages arrive at. We are utterly apart and out of sympathy with each other. We don't look at things in the same way."

"It is your fault!" she cried desperately.

"We won't discuss whose fault it is. The question is, what's to be done?"

“ ‘ Done ’ ? ” she cried, opening her eyes. “ Are you actually going to threaten me — now — at this moment ? ”

“ I am not threatening anything. I am convinced that you are at the present moment simply carried away by flattery and adulation. I don't believe for a moment that there is anything serious. If I did — ” He stopped, frowned at the leap of his pulses, passed his hand wearily over his forehead, and said, “ But we have not come to that yet. At present I intend to protect myself.”

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ I don't intend to wreck my life because you refuse to understand. In other words, in order to avoid bankruptcy ” — he repeated the word — “ bankruptcy — I shall put you on an allowance and insist that you keep to it. For the next year or so we will materially change our scale of living.”

Her nerves, long taut, snapped at the vision of the future, which seemed the end of her ambitions. She burst into tears.

“ You come in to spoil everything. You make me hate everything. You've spoiled it all now — all ! And I was so happy ! ”

“ Happy ! Good God ! ” he thought. “ When my heart is breaking ! Who can talk to her — who can make her understand ? ”

He threw up his hands in the air in token of defeat and went out of the house.

IX

FORRESTER came back at eleven and went to a bedroom on the fourth floor, where a dresser was waiting for him with his costume. A dozen times during the evening he had said to himself rebelliously that he would not return, that he would send for his valise and catch the midnight express, pretending a sudden business summons. For, undisciplined in the social arts of concealment, he looked forward to the evening as one of exquisite torture. In the end, he comprehended that this liberty of action no longer existed, that no matter what the suffering, the rigid gods of etiquette must be served. He dressed, and as his body was well formed and his legs gracefully turned, he made a striking figure. Yet he was ill at ease. He felt ridiculously undressed. This was his first masquerade, and the compliments of the dresser only aroused his suspicions.

“Trying to work me for a tip, of course,” he thought, with a shrug of his shoulder. “Well, now for it!”

He went down to the second floor. Already the gallery that opened on the great stairway was alive with guests, a black arriving stream streaking through the brilliant throng which descended from the dressing rooms. He joined it, and it was not until he had crossed the first *salon* that an acquaintance recognized and spoke to him. In the further *salon*, at the foot of the great carved-stone fireplace — loot of impoverished Italy — Amy was standing. At first glance he cried involuntarily,

“Good God, how beautiful she can be!”

Her dress was a bewildering swirl of royal blue brocade, glowing as the first break of brilliant azure through a clearing storm—a subtle, winding profusion which wrapped her delicate body about so airily that she seemed, by some deft improvisation, to have been entangled in the flowing draperies as a fragile butterfly is caught in a silken net. The curled and powdered hair, piling up in a white cloud, turned in dainty ringlets about her clear temples and, winding down the slender neck, slipped across one bared shoulder, meeting a jeweled vine of starry eglantine which climbed up to the perfumed lattice of her tresses and hid itself in the mysteries of her head-dress. The daintily turned arms and wrists came whitely out from the dark-blue shadows of luxuriant folds, while her sensitive nose, her gay lips, her lively eyes under the quaint and pointed eyebrows, gave to the dainty oval a fragile aristocracy. All—poise, gesture, veiled glance and scented smile—held the incomparable seduction that once was Woman.

He crossed gravely to take his place by her side. Some one caught him by the arm. It was Steingall, picturesque in the costume of Largillière—Steingall, triumphant in the success of his hostess, which was his success.

“Wonderful, eh, Mr. Forrester?” he cried, with glowing eyes.

“Wonderful!”

“She must be painted like that,” said the artist, with his head on one side. “By Jove, what blues!”

“Of course,” he answered laconically, and continued on his way through the buzz of whispered praises that surrounded his wife.

Amy had grown restless at his delay, but this furtive anxiety only added liveliness to her expression. For the Andrew Forrester who had now emerged was incomprehensible to her. She resisted him; she sought to conciliate him, while she watched him with a growing apprehension. The moment he was there, she forgot everything but the intoxication of her personal triumph. She put out her hand eagerly and drew him to her, slipping her arm through his, to associate him with her own success and thus to reclaim him.

She was in a dangerous mood. Nothing educates a woman so much as the first touch of sorrow. Before, she had been an inconsequent child, distributing happiness and suffering with the same unconsciousness, never stopping to consider the result of an impulse, never comprehending her responsibilities later. But this sense of being protected and adored was now torn from her. A mental transformation had come. She stood alone, feeling that she must defend herself, fight her own battles, find herself her final security. She did not quite see what she should do, but she knew that another life, complicated and uncertain, was beginning. And as the obscurity ahead frightened her, her instinct strove to return to old landmarks. An hour before, she had revolted against her husband with all the strength of her nature. The explanation he had sought had ended only in a quarrel. But, aghast before the unknown, she felt surprised herself at the impulse which flung her back to him. She wished to conquer him, to dazzle him more than any one else, for it seemed to her that if she could establish the supremacy of her charm and beauty over him, that all might yet be repaired.

“Andrew — why, you are superb!” she whispered

to him in a moment of freedom, and her hands pressed his with a quick, impulsive pressure. "I am very, very proud."

"You are very beautiful," he said carefully but without enthusiasm, for he said to himself, "She is afraid — it is only fear of the future which brings her to me."

In this he was wrong. Amy had not for one moment taken seriously his talk of economy. She saw in it only a whip to brandish over her, the sort of threats husbands always make in their anger.

She looked at him expectantly. If there were a flash of something in his eyes — an answering pressure of his hand! Then she turned away with a gripping of her heart. Little incidents often determine the tragedies of life. He had refused to yield a jot in this, the supreme hour of her youth and beauty! This was her last hope. She could never again bend him to her.

"What! Other men find me charming; other men look with eyes of envy, and I can't stir him — he alone does n't appreciate me," she said to herself bitterly, and, as she suffered acutely, she flung herself gaily into the light spirit of the evening, with a theatrical, dangerous excitement.

As she wandered through the rooms of the lower floor, which had been skilfully converted into arbors of trailing vines or alleys of boxed trees with illuminated fruit, with scores of sheltered corners for secret *tête-à-têtes*, all at once, among the later arrivals, she perceived Monte Bracken. He was in an elaborate plum-colored costume of a prince of the royal blood, the black curls built high over the temples and spilling

over the shoulders, flashes of delicate lace at the wrists, multi-colored ribbons, golden embroideries on the vest, and a frill of the choicest cambric at the throat, below which sparkled the orders of the Toison d'Or and the Saint Esprit.

He bowed with exaggerated deference, kissing the end of her fingers easily and naturally. Her hand rested on his a moment forgotten, as she looked at him, seized with a sudden, surprised admiration, agreeably drawn to his handsome, dark figure. Of all the men she had met, she was the most anxious for his good opinion. Their eyes met, and she felt a quick, excited flutter as she saw the start of surprise that came into his as he continued to look at her. The moment was not long, but both were conscious of a sudden embarrassment that was half delight, half unease.

She waited eagerly for his compliment, but, for the first time, she saw him a prey to a certain awkwardness.

"Very glad to see you, Mrs. Forrester! I have been trying to find you," he said hastily, without taking his eyes from her.

She felt the same diffidence. She perceived that her hand was still in his, and withdrew it hastily.

"And your brother and his wife?"

"They are here. They've been trying to find you."

New arrivals broke in, forcing her attention. When she turned impatiently, expecting to find him at her side, he was gone. The memory of the light that had leaped into his eyes when he had discovered her loveliness seemed to give wings to her step. All her forebodings were forgotten; a delicious feeling of light-heartedness swept her up. She sought him in the crowd, and was aware that his glance continued to

follow her, but he did not approach her again. She waited with a tinge of disappointment for the spoken tribute which she coveted, longing for it to give completeness to her happiness.

But if Bracken still remained obstinately aloof, other men came up eagerly — men who had been more or less devoted to her, and, under the license of the evening, whispered their declarations to her. As for Tody Dawson, he was crushed at her transformation, hovering on the outskirts, watching her with timid adoration, as though suddenly conscious of his temerity in approaching anything so precious. So completely eliminated was he, so utterly elbowed from her presence, that she felt a new irritation at Andrew's obstinacy in taking his boyish sentimentality seriously.

"How absurd!" she said to herself lightly. "As though a boy like that could mean anything to me! He's useful, that's all."

A slight anxiety still remained in her mind until Gladys Challoner arrived. At the first glimpse of her dearest rival she smiled a contented little smile. Gladys was a striking figure in brilliant green — a color few blondes would have dared — but she remained, despite every artifice, modern to her fingertips. Startling and imposing she was, but the fragile charm of perfumed days which hovered about the younger rival quite escaped her.

Claire Bracken caught her by the arm, smiling and serene as usual.

"You exquisite creature, you quite eclipse us all!" she said, in genuine admiration. "And, with you, it's real!"

Between the two, opposite as they were in everything that goes to make up human character, there had

been, from the first, an impulsive attraction which mystified their friends. Their intimacy had not yet gone further than a few formal visits, yet each had the feeling that a greater friendship was waiting. Amy slipped her hand under her friend's arm.

"I'd rather have you think so than any one else," she said warmly. "Do you know, I never meet you without longing to really know you? Why don't I — is it New York? Please invite me again."

"I will — next week-end."

"Accepted."

"Is your husband here? I'd like to see him."

Amy nodded gratefully. Few of the guests expressed any interest in Andrew. In her mind, busily seeking ways and means, the thought came to her that she would like Mrs. Bracken to become a good friend to Andrew — perhaps she could bring him to reason.

Kitty Lightbody descended on them, voluminous and excited.

"What's this I hear, Amy? Good Lord, we're not going to dance minuets all night?"

"Don't worry," she answered, laughing; "that's only the fireworks. After midnight we return to New York."

"Lordy, I wish I could get back to a clinging frock too!" said Kitty, in a confidential whisper. "These balloonjibs make me look like a whale. You need n't shake your head — they do!"

Captain Barrisdale, who had come up in her train, contrived to dodge in and out of the crowd until Kitty had safely departed.

"Jove, but you take our breath away!" he said, in his bantering manner.

"Many thanks," she said, bowing.

"I wish your husband was n't so healthy," he said, looking at her closely.

"And why?" she said innocently.

"Oh, you understand very well what I mean," he said abruptly.

"It sounds like an ultra-modern proposal," she said, laughing.

"I say, you can give me all you want, but look here; I'm not the first one along."

"Look out," she said, raising her finger, amusement still in her eyes. - "I thought I gave you a lesson once, and you were to behave."

"What's wrong in saying you're the only woman ever got me — really got me — so that I'd take a second shot at matrimony —"

"You can say anything, if you know how to say it — but you don't."

"Perhaps not; but, all the same" — he glanced about and lowered his voice — "it is n't going to make you feel any worse to know that — if anything ever happened, well — one way or the other, I stand back of what I said."

"And you expect me to believe you?"

"I know you believe me," he said, looking at her fixedly. At times, the captain had no difficulty in making himself understood.

She left him with a deeper feeling than amusement. A year before, she would have been indignant at the rudeness of this declaration. It was significant of her social progress that now it rather pleased her. Captain Barrisdale, at forty-five, rich into eight figures, was considered a great catch.

"Well, there is one would marry me instantly," she thought to herself, as she moved somberly away.

It gave her a feeling of independence. Not that she had the slightest serious contemplation of such an eventuality, but that, in the security of the present, it was necessary for her to explore the future and mark it with certain dependable landmarks — one or two — the more the better. She made a tour of the floor, seeking her husband, and perceived him on the balcony, talking to Irma. She was not altogether pleased with this. She had given a measure of her confidence to Irma, but it was quite another thing for Andrew to do so. She did not altogether trust Irma. She caught the expression in his face, and it was to her like the skeleton at the feast.

“How adamant — how perfectly relentless he can be!” she thought. “Nothing can move him. He will never give up an idea. He is n’t human.”

What she could not understand was that he could remain unmoved at the spectacle of her success.

“No; he ought to be happy to have such a wife — a wife that every one wants,” she said, with a sudden lump in her throat. “And he won’t say a word to me — to make me proud — just because — because I have shown that I have spirit, too.”

Midnight rang. Dawson came up. It was time for the minuet.

X

MONTE BRACKEN could do more things better than any man he had ever met, yet in every endeavor he remained of the second rank. All games and sports came to him easily. He played the piano with a genuine talent and comprehended music passionately and profoundly. He had an instinct for beautiful things wherever met. His taste was sure, and distinguished between the meretricious and the stark simplicity of great art. He had written occasional essays, distinguished for charm, humor, and an Old-World penetration acquired from a short diplomatic experience in Paris and Vienna. He lacked but one thing — the spur of necessity. Until thirty, he had cherished the hope that he would make his name known in diplomacy or in letters. But as the years glided on in their easy course, a feeling of disillusionment replaced the glow of early dreams. He became a brilliant *flaneur*, a sort of demi-hero, and he consoled himself as all such dramatic temperaments do. Love to him was a periodic and necessary intoxication. When he was in love, all the really brilliant qualities of his mind awoke, and periodically, in that narcotic state of dreams, he believed that he was on the verge of doing something worthy of what he knew he possessed. The need of love made him believe in love. He had had his share of what the French call "*bonnes fortunes*." Yet if he had been loved often, he had loved genuinely

if without discipline. He had that rare quality of being lovable — a quality which one has or has not, which cannot be imitated and is never acquired. He attracted women by a certain element of weakness they divined in his nature, that appealed to them, and called forth their treasures of generosity and sacrifice. Women loved him instinctively, but seldom deeply, and left him with kindness but small regret. On his side, the shock was acute; he experienced a profound depression for each experience irreparably spent of the fast diminishing fabric of his youth. So keen was this revulsion that he had come to dread the thought of any new entanglement, knowing too well the exquisite finality of pain. When, therefore, quite unprepared, he had come face to face with Amy Forrester and experienced that quick thrill of all his senses, his first instinct was to retreat.

“If I see her — if I talk to her — I know what will happen,” he said to himself. “Better to avoid danger.”

But if he avoided her, his eyes could not refrain from seeking her charming silhouette in the play of moving colors. He tried the distraction of conversations; he fenced with Irma, who usually amused him, and found suddenly that what he was saying had no meaning to him. From time to time his glance met Amy's. Her eyes, conscious of his scrutiny, sent him in turn their playful questioning.

“Why don't you tell me that I am charming, that I please you? What is the harm in that?”

And then she began to dance in the stately measures of the minuet. All at once he left the Challoners and went to the shadow of a doorway, standing alone, sheltering himself behind an orange tree, his eyes fixed on

the little figure in royal blue that was like the joy of the deep, clear sky through a parting storm.

In the long ballroom the lackeys had cleared the floor. The guests, against the walls on little footstools or camped on rugs, framed the dancers with the glowing tangle of many colors. Overhead, a black-blue canopy, shot with a thousand little holes, let through in starry radiance jewel-rays of light from the masked chandeliers above. The windows and the doors, framed in foliage, gave faint vistas of lake and melting hills lost in the sylvan night. Illuminated trees in the four corners of the cleared floor sent golden shafts over the polished surface. The air, rescued from the electric whiteness of the modern night, floated in harmonious and gentle flood. From the orchestra hidden in the balcony came the awakened surge of violins. The dancers courtesied, took places, and lifted their graceful arms. In the costumed throng, the murmur of voices was hushed as each guest, under the spell of rhythmic beauty, yielded to the fairyland of unreality.

At the first measure, Tody Dawson, troubled by this sudden concentration of many eyes, had a moment of stage fright. He blundered, missed his step, and, unable to recover himself, threw the figure into disorder.

Another moment, and the confusion would have been inextricable. Amy saw it and calmly, without embarrassment, clapped her hands. The orchestra came to a discordant pause.

"My fault," she said in a clear, laughing tone. "I ask every one's pardon — but such an audience is very, very terrifying! Every one ready? Begin again!"

She felt mistress of the situation, and the little amical nod she sent Dawson restored his confidence at

once. This time the measure moved without a break, amid a buzzing appreciation of her tact and poise.

The moment was critical in her life. It needs only the intoxication of one waltz to change the destiny of a young girl — how much more so such a triumph before a hundred rivals! As she danced, moving in swaying grace and poised with dainty gesture, hearing the murmured admiration which centered on her own loveliness, all the profound corruption in which she had moved — corruption of Morley, daily and insidious; corruption of the young fellows in her train who had infected her imagination with the craving for excitement; corruption of shops and the argus-eyed crowd; corruption of pleasant places and brilliant audiences — all the multiple corruption of New York which had been fastening about her, as a vine makes its capture, all this corruption reached its apotheosis in the ecstasy of this theatrical moment. This was her woman's career, her right to youth! If Andrew did not understand this, if Andrew did not realize what he had carried off like another Paris — then Andrew was blind indeed!

She danced, her head thrown back and a little to one side, smiling with half-closed eyes — at what? At the multiple public perhaps, every one of whom she wished to draw to her, to dazzle, to coax, and to entice. Her own sex was there, her dearest rivals. For this one night she could face them and defy them to pick a flaw. Glowing, serene, and awakened, her glance ran through the brilliant audience, seeking to visualize it. All at once, from beneath her eyelashes she found the eyes of Monte Bracken set on her. From that moment she danced to him. The complex public was comprehensible now in the smile on his lips and the glance which never left her.

The minuet over, she was caught in the crush of those who stormed about her with exclamatory compliments. She knew that he would not approach her in this public struggle. She waited the moment when he would seek her, a little restless at the insistent admirers who clung to her. The general dancing had begun. Escaping the crowd, she passed into the dining room with its red-and-gold tent. He was not there or in the outer hall.

She came restlessly through the corridors. Why did he avoid her? Why should he alone deprive her of the one compliment she longed to hear?

"Mr. Bracken!" He had seen her coming and started to turn away. "Do you know that you are the only one who has n't said something nice to me?" she said impatiently. "Are you running away from me?"

He bowed.

"Perhaps."

"Then you did n't like my dancing?"

"My dear Mrs. Forrester," he said in a low voice, "you must understand what I mean when I say that I was running away."

This was the tribute she needed to complete her happiness. She felt a sudden wave of joy. He was afraid — a little afraid of her.

"Please don't run away," she said, smiling happily, "and do say more nice things to me. You're the one person who really knows."

She stood before him on tiptoe, looking up at him with the eyes of a child who looks out in surprise on the world, and her glance asked so plainly, "Am I pretty; do I please you?" that his caution was given to the winds of impulse.

"You are the only one that is real here," he said suddenly. "All the rest of us are actors, powdered

and painted actors, without the glamour of the foot-lights. You are the real thing. You are France, the beautiful days, the indolence that will never come again. How do you do it? How does it come so naturally to you — the grace, the lightness, the exquisiteness, every movement, every motion? Even now as you are listening, 'nymph of the downcast eye and sidelong glance,' pleased at what I am saying to you, you are so much more charming than what I have said, that I feel as though I had told you nothing. You are so transformed that I don't know you — or rather, this is so truly you, what you were meant to be, that I can't imagine you any other way."

She colored, and drew a long, delighted breath.

"Oh! I feel like running away myself!"

"Don't!" he said hurriedly, and his hand half rose to retain her. "Let's play. It's part of the masque. We have our parts, too. It's carnival time! Tomorrow is near enough!"

"I don't know who I really am," she said, with answering excitement. "I feel — well, I feel so irresponsible, as though what I did or said was some one else. Do you understand?"

"You saw me watching you?" he said, looking at her.

She nodded.

"Of course I did. You know, I could n't find you at first. I looked for you in the gallery, and then all at once I saw you behind a tree. I wanted you to like me." She stopped. He had that dangerous quality of making women seek him, that led them unconsciously to venture further. She knew that she was on dangerous ground. Yet she could not resist the intoxication of enjoying what she had at last won in him. Besides,

it was all a game, a part of the masque, as he himself had said.

"You have arrived," he said quietly. "That sounds impertinent, but it is n't meant so."

"You remember what you prophesied?"

"But I was mistaken in one thing."

"What?"

"You have come to be what I foretold, though a hundred times more bewitching and dazzling than I expected, but — you have kept your heart of a child."

"To-night I've been saying just the contrary," she said abruptly, sobered.

"No, no! It is there," he said softly. "It is still unspoiled — and that's what's dangerous — for others."

"You are awfully nice," she said, smiling at him. "Please always say things to make me happy."

She said this quite unconcernedly, as though she had received the most trivial compliment; nor was he able to divine whether this was the art of the woman restoring the barrier between them or the unconscious soul of a child that is ignorant of the desires it sows.

"And now I must remember my 'duties,'" she said, with a pout, pronouncing that terrible word as only she knew how. "Will you come and ask me to dance later?"

"Often," he said, in a low voice.

The mischief was done, and he knew it. • Had it been done consciously or not? Despite his varied knowledge of women, he felt as though her soft little hands had closed over his eyes and a voice murmured,

"If you follow me, follow me blindly."

XI

WITH the serving of the supper the ball had reached its height. At the telephone, a reporter was sending in the last details before the closing of the presses. Detectives wandered among the guests, watching the imported servants. In a corner of the struggling dining room a knot of reporters, in dominoes provided by Steingall, copiously fed under the direction of the head caterer, passed the mighty in review, detailing anecdotes from their secret knowledge.

"Must be a million dollars' worth of jewels here."

"Nearer two."

"Say, Bill, get the name of the foreign gink who came with the Gunthers? What is he, Portuguese or Wop?"

"Mrs. Reggie's gone off badly this season."

"Grub's all right."

"Who's the sporty girl in red?"

"Mrs. Tontee, divorced Jack Albright last winter — remember the story down in Palm Beach?"

The speaker, a short, baldish, old-young man left the group and bore down on the lady in question.

"How do, Mrs. Tontee? Would you mind giving me some details about the costume you're wearing to-night?"

"Oh, do you really want to write something about me?" she said, shaking hands cordially. "The dress is nice, is n't it? It's genuine, too — worn by the Comtesse de Vrilly. Came down in my husband's family."

"Which husband?" asked the irrepressible spirit of the American press.

"Well — say nothing about that," said Mrs. Tontee, much amused. She wasted no pretenses on the gentlemen of the fourth estate, knowing them of old. "I don't suppose you 'd want photographs, but if you do, Sanderson & Sanderson have taken some beautiful ones."

"What 's the foreign feller with the Gunthers?"

Mrs. Tontee gave the required information sweetly, and volunteered several bits of useful details.

"Much obliged," said the reporter. "Anything you 'd like mentioned?"

"No-o. I 'm giving a rather important dinner. Call me up next week, in the morning — there might be something."

Irma Dellabarre passed on the arm of Jap Laracy, in search of her husband, a little apprehensive.

"I think he 's in the smoking room."

"Go and see, like a dear boy."

Laracy, having located Rudolph, returned.

"Is he enjoying himself?"

"He 's all right," said Laracy, who comprehended the question.

"Anyhow," thought Irma, glancing round the dining room, "whatever happens, he won't be conspicuous."

"Say, Irma, I 'll keep an eye on him," said Laracy. "Leave him to me; I 'll get him home at the right time."

"Thank you, Jap," said Irma, with a soft glance. "And now run along and dance with some pretty girl."

Monte Bracken and Amy passed her, entering the ballroom, so engrossed in each other that they did not

perceive her. There was a light in Bracken's eyes she knew — a certain way, too, of holding his head as though bending forward in accentuated deference. She knew she was no longer in love with him, and yet the spectacle of his awakening interest in another woman wounded her, bringing back disturbing memories. That this woman should be her close friend was particularly hard to bear. At that moment, happening to look up to the little balcony, she saw Andrew Forrester gazing down. She thought a moment and then went up. So engrossed was he in his own mood that it was not until she touched his arm that he noticed her coming.

"This is nice of you," he said gratefully, brightening up.

"How does it feel to be the husband of a great beauty?"

He smiled grimly. A moment before, looking down on the fairy panorama, he had been thinking that, in one night, he had thrown into the air what it had cost him to live two years as a bachelor.

"Wonderful scene — exquisite in every detail!" she said, looking down. "You've justified your motto."

"What's that?"

"Hang the expense!"

"Oh — I'd forgotten!" he said, with a bitter smile.

"Now, as Kitty says, they'll have a chance to feel natural," she continued, with a gesture toward the dancers, who were swinging into the lively measures of an ultra-modern dance, imported from the purlieus of the Barbary Coast.

The evening, which had begun in the decorum that had descended out of the stately past, burst into the riot of modern America.

"Yes; now they are more natural," said Irma, smiling. "We are not so far removed from the Zulus, after all, are we? And listen to the savagery of the music we dance to," she added, as at that moment the orchestra burst into a jumble of explosive chords, accompanied by every noise-provoking device of sand-shufflers, cowbells, clashing cymbals and drum-pounding, which, at that time, was considered the harmony of sweet rhythms. "Could Zulu make night more hideous or dance more grotesquely? After all, we're only a generation from the mining camp."

"It is nerve-shattering," Andrew said, laughing for the first time. "But you — you are n't dancing?"

She shook her head.

"I am too fastidious, perhaps," she said daintily, "but I prefer the old conception of woman to the catch-as-catch-can familiarity. I believe in maintaining the preciousness of oneself. I don't enjoy being pawed and mauled."

The idea was new to him. He considered it, comprehending instantly.

"You are right," he said, looking at her. Her personality at that moment enveloped him agreeably, like a delicious perfume. "But not many women would agree."

"How many of them are women?" she said, looking gently into his eyes with a glance that was all feminine. The gray, transparent eyes in the brown oval reflected the smiling seduction of her lips. He saw and admired the high pride of the throat and the long, graceful fingers closed over her fan.

"What a woman *she* is!" he thought; but recalled to gloomy thoughts, he said,

"Whose fault is it? Ours?"

She nodded, and, to meet the new interest in his eyes, offered her profile, extending her graceful arm with a slow release of the fan, which laid the nodding white plumes against the warm Spanish tints of her throat.

"So Amy has been talking to you?" he said abruptly. "Do you blame me?"

She turned, kindness in her eyes. If there was one thing she adored, it was for other women's husbands to spread their confidences before her.

"Of course I don't—I understand things she can't." There was no malice in her nature, and, on account of her instinct of coquetry, she was surer and more dangerous. "Your wife is very young, Andrew."

"That is true," he said gravely.

She laid her hand lightly on his arm, a passing touch.

"I'm sorry, Andrew."

"*She* can understand," he thought bitterly. He looked down on the rollicking pagans below, who laughed, danced, and made merry about his brilliant wife, and troubled themselves not at all about him in his isolation.

"There's one thing I must say," she said, for the look of pain on his forehead stirred a genuine sympathy: "You give too much importance to a boy like Tody Dawson. He is harmless."

"'Harmless'? Is he?" he took up moodily. "Oh, in a sense, yes. In another, no. It's his kind that have surrounded her, that have corrupted her. It's this empty, pleasure-seeking life, restless, always on the go, always wanting to be amused in some new way. It's the habits of excitement such young cubs give women—that starts all the harm!"

"Yes; what you say is true," she said gravely, and she was so impressed that she nodded twice.

"It's not a question of him," he said hastily. "It's a question of my dignity; and a man's sense of his own dignity is something he holds to!"

"You must make her understand," she said gently.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"That's only a little of it!" Then he looked at her, moved to confidences. "It's queer, but it was just the accident of our visit to Chilton changed my life."

"How so?"

"It did," he repeated, nodding his head. "It showed me what money could do. It was a revelation. I wanted what you had." He stopped, frowned, and, for a moment, plunged into the past.

"Don't say anything — if it is hard," she said, as he remained silent.

"I admired you," he said, as though he had not heard her. "Your taste, the quiet, the real elegance of your home, the order in the household, the way your children were brought up. I wanted a home like yours. I wanted her to be like you."

She was immensely flattered, for she adored to be told that she was a good housekeeper and a perfect mother. She was so grateful that he appreciated these qualities that, in the genuine liking she felt for him, she determined to try and help him.

"Do you realize how young she is?" she asked. "Is n't that a little your fault, too? You needed a woman to understand you and help you, and you chose a child."

"A good deal my fault — yes," he said loyally. "I know nothing about women. I've never had the time to study them. A cleverer man, I suppose, would n't have made the mistake I've made. Now the mischief's done."

"Are you sure?"

He nodded.

"She's out of my hand now. Oh, we'll go on — other marriages go on. But —" He shrugged his shoulders and glanced down at his hands which lay locked on the balustrade. "Well, I've readjusted myself; that's over."

"I don't think she realizes this," she said slowly.

"No; probably not. She will." He paused, and then said emphatically: "The trouble is, women don't realize what's important in marriage. We are the ones who fight the battle. We are the ones who build. Do anything else, but don't interfere with that!"

As he said this, his voice became hard and his face set in sternness. She comprehended in a flash the lack of compromise in his character, and what he must have suffered to come where he had come.

"What a pity!" she said, looking at him. "And a woman could do so much for you!"

"The right woman, yes!" he said abruptly. "You won't think I'm trying to pay you only a compliment. But if I had you for my wife — Good Lord, how much I could do!"

It was not a declaration; it was more — an appreciation, and it stirred her and lifted her to spiritual satisfaction as nothing had ever done before.

"The pity is, it's all so much a question of accident," she said meditatively.

"You turn to the right instead of the left at one certain moment," he said, nodding, "and your whole life hangs on it."

"I wish I could help you," she said impulsively, looking away from him.

"You have."

"I'm afraid you idealize me."

He shook his head obstinately.

"Not you!"

"I shan't forget what you said. I understand how you said it," she continued. "I can understand — because — well, because you are not the only one who has had to readjust."

He looked at her in amazement.

"You?"

"Are you blind?" she said gently, her eyes far away. The strains of a languid waltz floated about them, and the firefly glow of the mellow lights among the swimming colors below awoke dangerous moods.

He frowned, and a picture of Rudolph Dellabarre's watery little eyes and calculated steps retiring into the library for the night came to his eyes.

"Good heavens, you!" he said hastily. "I forgot."

She drew back, wondering herself at the impulse which had led her thus to match confidence for confidence, glancing around uneasily, fearing eavesdroppers.

"I wish I could help you," she said. "A man like you, a man who really counts, needs strength."

He looked at her, his eyes deep into hers.

"What a pity!" he said abruptly.

"It's all a question of accident," she said again pensively. "The right person comes at the wrong moment, as you say. I'm sorry, Andrew."

She nodded and left him. Presently he saw her below, stopping to greet some one. He liked the straight, graceful carriage of the body, and the dignity with which she offered her hand. There was a quiet, a gentleness about her — and she had a mind. Curious thoughts came to him as he followed her movements through the gay crowd —

The ballroom below him was still riotous with the gaiety of succeeding dances. The sound of women's laughter rose in shriller note. Perhaps if he had been happy his only emotion would have been of pride; but sorrow had touched him with its clarifying vision. He remembered that other crowd in which he had stood in the great terminal, the surging, purposeful sweeping towards the future of mingled America. How inconsequential all this luxury was in the great scheme!

"Let her dance, if that is all she understands," he said grimly, "so long as it does n't interfere with what I build."

XII

THEY were seated in a little bower of wistaria, Amy Forrester and Mrs. Bracken, and, by the gravity of their expression, the conversation must have been serious. Behind them, the low white bulk of the Colonial house shone over the lawns rich with the deep green tinge of early May. Before them an old-fashioned garden, with early note of crocus, tulip, and narcissus, wound in pleasant surprises out toward the fields, where the farm hands were harrowing the red soil for the early planting. In the paddock to the left Allan Bracken was giving the first lessons to Bob, aged eight, balanced on the back of a fat pony, while the three younger children, perched on the fence, were watching with tense admiration. Above them, in the arbor, the first clusters of wistaria were swelling in the bud. A weeping willow and a grove of maple trees in full leaf caught the slight impulse of the young breeze, redolent with the perfume of budding time. A lazy, fluffy cloud hung motionless against the blue span. It was pleasant to every sense, vaguely troubling to the imagination. It was in the full awakening country, and it was spring.

"I envy you more than any woman I know," said Amy Forrester, glancing toward the distant roll of hills, where the blue flash of the bay came rippling up with a myriad glancing helmets. "I wish I could live like this away from New York, out among real things. I used to — and," she added, with a laughing glance at her striped skirt, her chiffon blouse, and arched white slipper that gave her the air of a Dresden shepherdess,

"and I used to dress in overalls and ride home on the hay wagons."

"I wonder if you'd be happy now," said Mrs. Bracken frankly. She was in heavy boots, khaki skirt, and broad-brimmed hat, and her knitted sweater was covered with green remnants, while her hands were stained with the flowers which she was sorting in her lap.

"I wonder," said Amy, pensively. She stirred up the gravel with the tip of her lace parasol without looking at her companion. In the two days she had spent at the farm she had more than once been on the point of taking Claire into her confidence. Yet each time she found the opening difficult. "I don't see why you like me," she said at last, without warning.

Claire Bracken laughed her happy, whole-hearted laugh.

"In the first place, because you are a lovable person," she said directly.

"I think I am all wrong," said Amy, frowning.

Mrs. Bracken studied her a moment, trying to make out how genuine was this confession. Then she said, smiling,

"Yes, I think you are."

"What! You do think so?" said Amy, startled, for she was far from thinking so herself.

"Yes; but you are no worse than all the rest — and the pity is with you, there is so much real good in you. You really ought to count."

"If I only had a home like this, heavens, how willingly I'd give up all the rest!" said Amy, impulsively.

"I'm not so sure of your repentance, pretty lady," said Claire, smiling.

"Why not?"

"I think you've come up to a great climax, and now everything is relaxed — a little tame perhaps. It's the end of the season, but the appetite will return."

Amy laughed in confusion.

"Heavens! It's much easier facing my conscience than facing you!"

"Well, am I right?"

"Yes, I think you are," she admitted, serious all at once. "I've had a taste of excitement, and I crave it. I suppose it's my destiny and I'll go on burning myself out. And yet — I'm restless — I'm not really happy!"

"Why don't you have children?" said Claire.

"So soon?" said Amy, aghast, for she was far from expecting this answer. She started to defend herself by falling back on Andrew, but she was in the mood for confession, which also is a dramatic impulse of the coquette. "Frankly, I don't want them now — because I'm selfish, because I want to enjoy my youth. Now you know the worst about me. I adore society; crave excitement, and I can't give it up. Can you understand a selfish little beast like myself?"

"I can understand a good many things," said Claire calmly. "I think I may see you better than you do yourself. You are the kind that can do a lot of harm in this world or a lot of good."

"I once felt the way you do — when I was first married — I wanted children, but Andrew, my husband, did n't want them."

"Why?"

"Because he was foolish enough to want me to play!"

"And yet you are not happy?"

Amy shook her head, then she corrected herself.

"That is, I am restless."

At this moment, across the fields came the galloping thud of horses' hoofs. Monte Bracken and Fifi Nordstrum came racing up to the paddock with the result that Master Bob, in the excitement, went sprawling onto the sod.

"He's fallen!" exclaimed Amy, jumping to her feet.

Mrs. Bracken glanced up without agitation.

"Bob's a good soldier," she said simply. "The sod's soft."

The next moment Monte Bracken had swung the youngster up into the saddle in front of him and came cantering along the fence.

"All right; no bones broken. A chip of the old block," he said, waving his hat in delight at the laughing youngster. Then, wheeling, he rode back to where Fifi, who had rounded up the fat pony, was waiting.

"I wish Monte would marry your cousin," said Mrs. Bracken suddenly.

Amy opened the parasol and closed it again, her eyes on the paddock. Just why this should throw her into confusion surprised her. Since the ball she had carefully avoided Monte Bracken and, despite the intimacy of the house party, she had managed never to be left in *tête-à-tête*. Yet she found herself resenting Mrs. Bracken's suggestion.

"They will never fall in love with each other, I'm afraid."

"Why not?"

"They are too much alike — and too good friends," she explained. "But you do surprise me. I thought Fifi would be the last person you would pick out — with your ideas. I thought you would look on her as a wild,

harum-scarum tomboy, who would never settle down." She felt that she was putting too much emotion into her objection, so she added, "That's not my belief."

"She has two qualities that will make her marriage a happy one," said Claire, without looking at her companion. "She is loyal, and she has pride. Whatever belongs to her, she will make a success. I like Fifi very much."

"Is this aimed at me?" thought Amy. She hazarded a glance. Mrs. Bracken was bending over her flowers.

"Perhaps you are right about Fifi. The trouble is I don't think she would ever think of marriage unless she were head over heels in love — or your brother-in-law either."

"That is the trouble. It's a pity. They are so suited to each other. She would be a real force behind him. Afterward they would grow together.

"That's rather the continental point of view than ours, is n't it?" said Amy, smiling.

"There is a middle ground between the two. Do you wish me to speak frankly?"

Amy hesitated, and again the point of her dainty parasol traced arabesques in the gravel.

"I am a little afraid of you," she said, raising her glance. "You are too happy."

"You need never be afraid of me, whatever happens," said Mrs. Bracken. She leaned over and laid her hand on Amy's with gentleness in her eyes, such as only those who have borne a secret cross can know. "We have wanted to talk to each other from the first, have n't we? Why not now?"

"It is very hard — just now," said Amy. Her eyes filled with tears. She rose, took a few steps, and came

back. "I am very foolish. Don't mind me." She sat down, stared ahead a long moment, and then said slowly: "Mrs. Bracken, what is a girl to do who has married blindly and then suddenly wakes up to the fact that there is no longer anything in common with her husband, neither love nor sympathy nor understanding of any sort? What is she to do with her life — and particularly if the moment comes when she meets some one else who she knows would mean happiness in every way — if she had only known how to choose? What is she to do?"

"You are not there yet."

"No, no — but it will come; of course it will come. A woman really must love sometime!" She turned, terrified at what she had said. "Do you know it's horrible what I've told you? I've never even thought it myself."

"I don't admit that things are so bad," said Mrs. Bracken, shaking her head. "And I don't think you are right in your estimation of your feelings toward your husband."

"I am — I am," she said obstinately, her eyes obscured.

"You feel too much what you say not to care," said Mrs. Bracken quietly; "and as for him, I know he loves you." She came near adding, "By the look of pain I've seen in his face," but unwisely she refrained.

"Good heavens! We are a thousand miles apart!" Amy sprang up again and stood against the arbor, tearing off the young buds and twisting them in her fingers. "I can't talk about it just now. I can't go into details as I would have to," she said hurriedly.

"Then don't, my dear. When you are ready —"

"Yes, yes; some later time," she answered. She was

not ready yet to face such a clear-eyed judge, not yet sure of the verdict.

"Let us avoid personalities, then," said Mrs. Bracken, and, for the first time, her glance rested on the young wife with a touch of uneasiness. "Let me see if I can make you understand my point of view about marriage," she continued, in a quieter tone, which brought Amy gradually back to calm. "I may seem to you old-fashioned. I don't believe in the modern women — the women of our world, that is. I don't believe in the way young girls are brought up to feel that they owe nothing to life but to accept the sacrifices of others. I don't believe in the disorganization that a young girl of eighteen is pitchforked into in what is called her 'débutante year.' I don't believe in cramming into a few months all the pleasures which should come naturally through life — and be enjoyed naturally. I don't think it's fair to the girl — or to the man who has to marry her. I don't believe in a woman being freed of all responsibilities as a wife or a mother, existing only to enjoy what her husband makes, without sharing his worries or helping in the economy of his existence. Moreover, I don't believe in the modern wife, after a year or two, a baby or two, taking up again the same life of flattery and adulation she has had as a young girl."

Amy felt her cheeks go red.

"And yet you like me!" she said, with a gasp.

"It's not the woman's fault — that's the pity. It's the American sentimentalization toward us. It's we who are cheated."

"What do you believe in then?"

"I believe in bringing up my girls to marry, not in a sentimental mawkish outburst, but with a knowledge

of the things they expect in a husband, whom they wish to admire, cherish, and assist. And I am going to bring them up to be prepared to play a great part in that marriage, to know the conduct of the household, to develop their executive qualities, and I am going to bring them up to a belief that the highest ideal is to be a wife and a mother and to know how to maintain that ideal in the eyes of their husbands and their children. I'm going to do that, because I want their happiness."

"Yes; but what ideal?" Amy murmured, drawing a deep breath.

"The ideal of duty, naturally," said Mrs. Bracken, simply.

"Oh, duty, duty!" exclaimed the younger woman, in a burst of revolt. "It's always that! After all, what is duty?"

"Duty, my dear, is simply self-respect," said Mrs. Bracken gently. "It means that what a woman does, does not depend on any such philosophies as you and I hear every day — if my husband does that, I'll do it, too. It means that you are brought up first, last and always, with the need of respecting yourself, and, whatever comes, that you will never soil that ideal. You see, I belong to a family that does n't simply go to church," she added, after a moment, "but makes its religious belief the reason of its conduct."

"Oh, yes; if you believe — I understand," Amy said, in a low voice.

"And if you don't — what are you all seeking? Happiness, of course. Do you think Irma Dellabarre or Gladys is really happy? Are you?"

"Mrs. Bracken, it must sound terrible," said Amy, and the tears came to her eyes again; "I think I am happy, I truthfully think I am. I might say no in some

moods. A dozen times since I've been here and loved your life and all that, I could have said no, but at the bottom —" She rose and shook her head, "Yes; I want the life I lead."

"Answer me in a year."

"Life is easier for you," Amy said, hurrying on. "You have made no mistakes. Don't be too hard on others. Don't judge me too severely."

"I don't," said Mrs. Bracken, rising in turn. She came and stood by her side. "And the proof is I am going to ask something of you."

"I will do anything in the world for you, Mrs. Bracken — anything you ask," said Amy impulsively.

"Will you?"

"Anything if you'll only be my friend!"

"I want Monte to marry your cousin," said Mrs. Bracken. "Don't do anything to interfere with it, will you?"

"But — why —" For a moment she could not get her breath. Then she said hurriedly, "Why, Mrs. Bracken, such a thing — why, I have never —"

"Don't!" said Mrs. Bracken, looking at her and, before that clear look, Amy's glance fell. "You attract him very strongly. I saw that from the first night. There is so much that is fine in him. I want to see him happy. He means so much to us."

Amy looked at her in wonder, and this time it was Mrs. Bracken's eyes that turned away.

Something caught her like the closing of cruel fingers across her heart. A sob rose in her throat, before something she could not see clearly. She caught Mrs. Bracken's hand and kissed it.

"I promise," she said hastily. "I promise I will do everything I can to help."

XIII

MONTE BRACKEN was to drive them back to the city. The afternoon had been so delicious that they had postponed the leaving until after dinner. The night was clear and sown with stars. Under the mellow region of the porte-cochère lamps, they looked, in their fur coats, like Esquimos starting on a hunt. Claire and her husband stood arm in arm, while the valises were stowed and the ladies bundled into the back seat and were smothered in furs.

"Come again soon, pretty lady," said Allan, running down to Amy for a last boyish handshake. "Fifi, you're part of the family always. Bye-bye, Monte. It's been a bully time!"

Amy freed one arm and kissed her hand to Mrs. Bracken, who stood on the steps, smiling back at them. Between them, no further word of intimacy had been spoken, but in the meeting of their glances they knew that the compact of friendship had been sealed.

The next moment the searchlights swept over the low, vine-covered Colonial home into the pine grove, and fastened on the white road ahead.

"What a wonderful person!" said Amy, leaning back until the sprinkled stars closed over her.

"Cleverest little woman I know," said Fifi emphatically. "Only thing I can't make out is why she has any use for me!"

"If you'd heard what she said about you —"

"Oh, yes; she believes in my repentance," said Fifi, cutting in. "That's because she wants me to tame Monte and marry him."

"Well, why don't you?" said Amy, after a moment's laughter at her cousin's slapdash way.

"If she'd oppose me, I'd do it," said Fifi frankly. "I've never yet done anything any one wanted me to do, and I suppose I never will."

"Fifi, you're incorrigible," said Amy, determined to live up to her promise, despite her dislike of her cousin's confident assumption that the decision lay in her hands.

"Hello there, Monte," said Fifi, poking into the voluminous fur back in front of her. "Did you know that Claire is trying to splice us up?"

"Don't worry!"

"Now, that's a passionate answer," said Fifi gaily. "Don't worry yourself. You're interesting as a bold bad man, but as a captive husband you'd be flat. You shan't be spoiled — if I have to mount guard over you. I don't feel a bit like going home," she continued, sitting back; "could n't we run in on Irma for the night? Friend husband's off fishing — it ought to be quite cheerful."

"We refused to spend the night at the Brackens; it would hardly look right, would it?"

"Oh, no; of course not. Bother it!" said Fifi, who relaxed with a sigh. "What's Irma up to, anyhow?"

"Crocodile hunting, I suppose," said Amy, with a laugh. "I have n't seen her for a week, and that's a sign."

Fifi started to say something and abruptly checked herself. After a moment, she said casually,

"I suppose Andrew's worried at the Mexican muss."

"Yes, I'm afraid so!"

The Tampico incident and the consequent fall in Osaba shares, with the aftermath of the ball in incidental bills, had been soul-trying.

"When does he get up again?"

"Any time now," said Amy.

"Little spat over?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"That's right — be firm," said Fifi, with a nod. "Irma is right. When husbands growl nowadays, it's usually financial dyspepsia. I say, let's shut up — this is too gorgeous!"

Amy, nothing loath, relapsed into silence. In the three weeks of her husband's absence, she had no word of his plans. The day after his leaving, she had received a short, business-like note, informing her of the allowance which he wished her to observe and requesting the total of her present debt. She had sent them — that is, almost all — and they had been paid through his office immediately. She had been surprised at his liberality — even touched by it. There was, at any rate, nothing petty about him. At least she could admire him. But that was all. There had been no further discussion. She accepted his decision as an ultimatum. After all, why discuss? They had never really talked openly to each other, and they probably never would. No compromise was possible with one of his obstinacy. In a way, the decision was a relief — constant daily contact would have been more difficult.

"Drop me first, Monte," said Fifi, waking up at last. "No; it's not manners or etiquette. Just sim-

ply moods, that's all. If I were left alone with you, I'd be nasty."

Amy started to protest, for she was apprehensive of a *tête-à-tête*, but all at once she reassured herself by the thought that this would be a good moment to open up the subject of Fifi.

"Why don't you spend the night with me?" she said half-heartedly.

"No, no! Communing with nature's got on my nerves," said Fifi. "Home for me!"

They left her at the old family residence on lower Fifth Avenue, just off Washington Square, and started up-town, over the vacant streets, across which an occasional taxi went sputtering, a milk wagon rattled, or a newspaper truck screamed on its breathless rush for the outward mails. She had come into the front seat beside Bracken. The car slowed down to a colloquial pace.

"Nice time to talk, don't you think? Not sleepy?"

"Quite awake."

"Yes; you always are," he said, turning toward her with a smile. "And tremendously alive."

The slightest compliment, even the most obvious, from him gave her an instant pleasure. But to-night she feared an approach to intimacy, so she began resolutely.

"You knew that Claire wished you to marry Fifi?"

"What? Oh, yes."

She hesitated, then went on with some difficulty:

"You would be very happy in your own home, with some one to work for and some one to help you. But I suppose you don't believe in marriage."

"On the contrary, yes—I do very strongly," he said quietly. "I think my brother the most fortunate

man in the world. He lives as human beings were meant to live. He's part of the soil, part of his time and part of his community. The rest of us are just transients."

"Then the most reasonable thing you could do would be to marry Fifi," she said resolutely. "She cares for you, I'm certain, and she has lots of the qualities of your sister-in-law—if she only had a chance to bring them out."

"Fifi's good stuff," he admitted.

"Then why not?"

"Why?"

He asked the question as though to himself and relapsed into a moody silence. Madison Square, with its calm, green pools of darkness, its beggars huddled on benches, and the high, fairy tower with its golden clock, was at their side; the great thoroughfare deserted, save for a wandering shadow, a flare-up of gasoline at a fruit stand and a late car switching noisily over the echoing stones.

"Why?" he repeated. "Because I never do anything reasonable, I suppose. Kismet. I'm made differently or started wrong. Even Fifi sees that; she would n't change me. You must have realized that about me," he said, turning and looking at her.

"I don't know," she said faintly. His head was in shadow, but she felt the luminous eyes looking down into hers.

"They say a lot of nasty things about me, I suppose. If they only knew! I'm the one who pays. It's seeking an ideal—chasing a will-o'-the-wisp—the longing for beauty."

"You must have suffered," she said involuntarily, "suffered a great deal. Is it worth it?"

"It is worth it," he said solemnly. "And I am willing to suffer all again," he added, in a low voice.

In all this there was nothing personal, yet every word he said came directly to her. She sank her head in the furs till only her eyes showed under the low brim of her hat. The light of an arc-lamp flashed across his set lips, and the eyes that burned darkly in the soft face — no, there was nothing tame about him.

"Why does he say this to me?" she asked herself, held half by terror and half by a leaping sensation of joy. She sought to convince herself that she did not know the answer, but she did not ask the question of him.

"However, there comes a time," she said resolutely, "when you change — when you need other things of life."

"Perhaps."

"I'm going to persuade you yet."

He did not answer this, except to increase their speed with a sudden release that sent them flying up the avenue, past Forty-second Street with its tinsel lights, past the married towers of the cathedral plunging into the blossoming stars, into the opening spaces at the foot of the park, and quickly into the quiet street.

"Now that all good things come to an end," he said, turning to her, "I'm going to say an impertinent thing. I shan't forget those hours —"

"Don't," she broke in hurriedly.

"Those unreal hours," he continued, "back in the days of Louis XIV. When I think of you, dear lady, I shall always think of *La Mode Louis Quatorze*. If we could only live like that," he said, in sudden rebellion.

"We can't."

"No; of course not."

He descended; helped her out with exact deference — no more — and opened the door with the key she gave him. Then he took off his hat.

"Good night — and thank you for this half-hour," he said, smiling at her. "You have the quality of painting memories that last. Everything about you is gentle and exquisite." He took the hand she extended to him with a feeling of drowsy lightness in her head, and raised it to his lips.

"*A la mode Louis Quatorze*," he said.

She went up to her bedroom with a feeling of happiness. She assured herself that he had not trespassed beyond the limits of a sympathetic friendship. She had shown him plainly that she did not intend to encourage a flirtation. She had kept her word to Claire Bracken, and the consciousness of her own virtue gave her an extraordinary self-satisfaction. There was so much good in him — Claire was right; he would respond so wonderfully to a real home, to children, and a wife who would give him strength. How readily she understood these needs in him!

"Yes; he must marry Fifi," she said, with determination.

Toward morning, she awoke in a troubled wakefulness that defied all her efforts to return to sleep. The memory of Monte Bracken haunted her. How sympathetic they were, even to the unspoken thoughts, the moments of delicacy which each divined.

"I must not see too much of him," she said, turning on her pillow. "We understand each other too easily. I must be careful." She looked back, in the light of her acquired self-knowledge, at the girl who, in the

old-fashioned garden, had decided her life so rashly, so irrevocably, and, in the same revolt which had come to Andrew as he had faced the image of himself the night of the ball, she cried,

“If I had only known then what I do now!”



PART III

PART III

I

KITTY LIGHTBODY came in, puffing and red, making such a racket as she passed the tables, that the lecturer on the news of the week, a thin, grayish woman in a poke bonnet, momentarily interrupted her flowing nasal comments.

"Thought I'd never get here, dear," said Kitty loudly, embracing first Irma and then Amy. "Eleven o'clock's like a dawn tea." She settled into her seat, rose again to shed a brilliant topaz sweater coat, and, oblivious of the waiting audience, resumed her whispering. "I'm just crazy about the idea, are n't you? I wish she'd read the new books and magazines for us. Has anything exciting happened last week?"

"At home, as you probably all know," took up the lecturer, "the week in Congress has been an eventful one."

In the pleasant music room of the Chilton Yacht Club, two score of women were scattered in groups of twos and threes, giving a painful attention to the light, gliding phrases of the lecturer, who, for three dollars a ticket, relieved them of the fatiguing daily search of the newspapers by these fashionable Monday mornings, felicitously named "Half-Hours With the World." The windows were open to the blue flash of water and the glare of white sails hung against a glowing June sky. From outside came the call of the play-

ers on the tennis courts and the subdued sounds of a phonograph, where, at the further end of the veranda, a group had begun to dance.

"My Lord, that new fox-trot is catchy!" continued Mrs. Lightbody, with a sigh. "It's *too* distracting, and I must listen. It's so instructive, is n't it?"

A girl in white flannels, swinging on the sill of the open window, half in the room and half out, was listening by fits and starts, snickering with a young fellow who, from the veranda, was trying to upset her gravity.

"At Washington, the terms of the new Federal Reserve Bank law have been generally discussed," said the voice of the lecturer, "but I won't trouble you with such dry details."

"Excuse me," said a large, square woman, militantly, "but that's just what I do want to know."

"Yes; please do tell us," said a piping voice up front. "I can't make head or tail out of it."

"The Federal Reserve Bank law can best be explained in this way —" began the lecturer.

"Absurd to waste time on such subjects," said Kitty wearily. She turned to Irma. "Has she said anything about that Newport scandal yet? My dear, he was n't a count after all!"

"Be quiet, Kitty," said Mrs. Dellabarre, with a frown, as there came a sudden impatient craning of heads in the direction of the disturbance.

Mrs. Lightbody's china eyes momentarily fixed themselves in a solemn contraction. At this moment, Jap Laracy wandering in, in search of amusement, installed himself behind Amy.

"Fine day for the trip. Monte's coming up to the dock now."

Amy glanced at her wrist impatiently — there were still ten minutes to be spent instructively.

“In England, the tension between the Irish Nationalists and Ulster has become exceedingly acute —”

“Jap, dear, who is our vice-president?” said Mrs. Lightbody, relaxing. “I tried to remember, but — do you know? — I could n’t to save my life.”

“William Jennings Bryan,” said Laracy solemnly.

“Of course.” She looked at him a moment suspiciously and then appealed to Amy.

“Abroad a rather important bit of news is announced in the morning’s papers,” continued the monotonous tones on the quiet June morning. “At Sarajevo the Archduke Ferdinand of Austria is rumored to have been assassinated.”

There was a stir of surprise. A woman’s voice was heard exclaiming,

“I read the papers, but I did n’t notice that!”

“Now, that is exciting,” said Kitty Lightbody, sitting up. She frowned on the incorrigible Jap, and said, with an admonitory shake of her head. “Behave, Jap; we must concentrate!”

But Laracy was not so easily subdued. A salad of pink and green trimmings on a platter of a hat in front of him had caught his eye.

“It excites all the little birdies on the bonnets,” he said, in a whisper. “Look — look, how they’re trying to reach it!”

Mrs. Lightbody forgot the triviality of another assassinated Archduke and began to giggle at this banality. Thus encouraged, Laracy passed the audience in review, according to his own peculiar style of wit. Amy glanced again at her watch. A year ago, she would have shared Kitty’s amusement. To-day, she

scarcely gave ear. The antics of the household pets had no longer their first charm. She had passed beyond playing with children into the more dangerous need of stronger emotions. Dawson, Pardee, and Laracy and their kind were still useful, but only to fill in. At length, with a sigh of relief, she sprang up. The lecture was over.

"Goodness, what awful names they select! Sara — Sara — I shall never get it," said Kitty Lightbody. She turned to Amy, who was chatting to a group. "Amy dear, what news of friend husband?"

"Down in Mexico, of course," said Mrs. Forrester, lightly. She turned on the brilliant red parasol, which she held from her to give length to her arm and free the line of her graceful body, and, knowing that the pose was becoming, she held it a little longer while exclaiming to the group of women whose eyes devoured greedily the Gainsborough hat and the flowing line of her new gray taffeta dress, "Oh, I'm getting used to the rôle of a neglected wife. We all come to it, don't we?"

But suddenly remembering her engagement, she freed herself from the group and linked arms with Mrs. Dellabarre.

"Irma, really, can't you arrange to come?" she said, in final entreaty.

"I would if I could, my dear," said Irma, shaking her head. "It's quite impossible for me to leave the house to-day. I must be there when the doctor comes to see Doris."

"It'll be gorgeous running back in the moonlight."

"I know — don't make it harder."

"But that leaves us with an extra man," said Amy, frowning.

"Don't worry; Kitty 'll take care of two," said Irma, with a smile.

"She won't go because I've taken Monte away from her," thought Amy, noticing the smile. Aloud, she said: "It's not a twos-ing party at all. We keep together!" She turned to Mrs. Lightbody, "Well, if we're going to make New York for lunch, we must be off. All the same," she thought, as they passed into the glare of the sun and made their way down the dock, "it's going to be a bore having an extra man. The extra man, of course, was Tody Dawson.

"I don't believe Doris is ill at all," said Kitty, linking arms with her.

"Nor I."

"She's done it on purpose," said Mrs. Lightbody, with a convinced nod. "Unless — unless it's a question of Rudy. He's been in a dreadful state lately, have you noticed?"

"I've a mind to leave Tody behind," said Amy pensively.

"Oh, my dear, it would break the poor boy's heart!" said Kitty instantly. "His nose is out of joint as it is."

"He's going to be dreadfully in the way. You will have to look after him."

"Don't worry, my dear; I know my rôle!" said Kitty, laughing.

At this moment, Dawson, as though divining her thoughts, came up.

"I say, Amy, if Irma's backed out, I'll walk the plank if you say the word."

The look of entreaty in his eyes, the perfect docility of his attitude moved her to compassion.

"Poor boy, he's still dreadfully in love with me,"

she thought, and aloud she added, "No, indeed, Tody; would n't leave you out for the world."

At the smile with which she favored him, his face lighted up. A moment before, the sky was tumbling down. Now, just to be near her, to watch her covertly from a distance, to hear the sound of her voice and fill his eyes with her loveliness, changed the face of the world.

"By George, you are a trump, you are!" he said incoherently, and he went hastily up the dock. He adored her as a pagan worships, with his head to the soil. No woman could be so angelic, no woman!

Monte Bracken, in white flannels, was at the gangway of the speedy little motor-yacht that had its red-and-white awnings out. The next moment, they were lounging in lazy, cushioned chairs, the spray curling whitely at their sides, rushing across the mackerel waters to New York.

II

AMY FORRESTER, like most women of her bringing up, had dramatic moments of good impulses which surprised even herself, but these once over, the old habits of irresponsibility and self-indulgence resumed their sway. Old habits led her to satisfy her desires without further tax on her conscience than the need of deceiving herself as to her motive. She wished to see Monte Bracken, so she easily persuaded herself that the new intimacy which developed was in reality working for his happiness and the interests of Fifi Nordstrum. But, a week before, that independent young lady clarified the situation by announcing her engagement to a Western engineer without a cent or a social connection, sublimely confident in his own star — a conviction which Fifi cheerfully shared. After her surprise had subsided, Amy was well-enough pleased with this dénouement. She had performed her whole duty, and she was now absolved. Monte Bracken in future would be on the basis of any other attractive man of the world, forewarned of the terms and limitations of the intimacy permitted.

A certain stiffness settled on the party, despite the determined efforts of Kitty Lightbody and the usual minstrel patter of Jap Laracy and Tody Dawson. It had neither the intimacy of a *tête-à-tête* nor the opportunities of a crowd. Bracken was in bad humor; the

conversation plainly bored him and, having no intention of descending to its level, he retired behind his cigar. Amy shared his impatience. It was not thus that she had looked forward to this excursion. Tody Dawson, knowing himself in a false position, floundered on heavily, seeking to conciliate Amy by being amusing without perceiving how much he bored her. At such moments, the gentlest of women are capable of a refinement of cruelty.

"Really, Tody," she said, with a shrug of her shoulders, "if you are going to be amusing, you must learn some new tricks. Those jokes are very old. I know them by heart."

Tody Dawson's face went blank under the reproof.

"It's too far to swim," he said, glancing at the distant shore with an attempt to cover up his misery. He turned up his collar and said, with a submissive bow: "I'm crushed. Put me in a corner and punish me."

He went up forward in gloomy dignity where, in a moment, Kitty Lightbody, after an exchange of glances with Amy, went to console him with Jap Laracy.

"Now, I suppose I've hurt his feelings," said Amy, "but really those boys do get on my nerves sometimes."

Bracken's good humor returned instantly.

"No great harm's done. They'll amuse themselves." He drew up his chair by hers. "I can't abide the type. Have n't you progressed beyond them?"

"It's rather hard to drop them all at once," she said pensively, "and they are so convenient."

He looked at her, his amusement returning as his ill-humor cleared.

"Yes; of course they are convenient," he agreed.

"I suppose they fill a place in the lives of you women that real men could not. We ought to be grateful for that."

"Are you in a very bad humor, Monte?" she said, glancing up at him. In the last month they had progressed to the intimacy of their first names.

"Not now. Can't we manage to lose them in town somehow?" he said suddenly. "The ride home ought n't to be spoiled."

She shook her head slowly.

"A sailor and a butler are chaperons enough surely!"

"No; I can't do that," she answered firmly. She had often, in self-defense, fallen back on her intention to remain a virtuous wife. The phrase flashed into her mind, but she decided not to employ it on Monte. Instead, she added decidedly, "I won't be talked about."

"You're a strange person," he said impatiently.

"I'm like that," she said quietly. "You know my ideas."

"At the bottom," he said rebelliously, "I believe one man is just the same to you as another. Despite all you say about the Tody Dawsons in this world —"

"Well?" she said, as he stopped.

"Total docility and innocuousness are quite sufficient."

She laughed.

"I give you permission to abuse me."

Monte Bracken had returned into her life at a critical moment. It was not that she was tired of society, but that she was momentarily tired by it. The dramatic thrill of her personal triumph at the Versailles fête had been the climax of her season. After those dazzling hours, everything else seemed tame in com-

parison. She had felt let down. A new mental progression had come — that moment which arrives to every brilliant woman. In the whole world, nothing, for the moment, interested her so much as herself. She wanted to annex Monte Bracken, because she felt the need of some superior mind, capable of understanding her, of explaining her, and of admiring her completely, even to the smallest trifles which escaped the ordinary eye. Whether Bracken flattered her or humorously dissected her, her interest was always the same — as long as the subject discussed was herself. Perhaps, if anything, she liked him in his savage moods, for then, underneath his sarcasm, she divined how completely she had established her empire over his imagination.

"I can understand Kitty Lightbody turkey-trotting through life, but I can't understand you," he began, assuming a tone of raillery which she disliked because to her, like most women, it was the only male weapon she feared. "Are you going to be contented with nibbling at life? Women like that have only passions for great emotions like ping-pong, bridge, the tango, ice-skating."

"And I?"

"I wonder."

"You warned me once I was not like that."

"Yes; I gave you credit for a heart," he said, smiling.

"And now?" she asked, drawing back and half veiling her face with the collar of her golden polo coat. There were times when she found it difficult to face him.

He looked into her eyes steadily until, at last, she turned hers away. Then he said quietly,

"I still believe it."

"That I still have a heart — after all the bad things you believe of me?" she said, raising her eyebrows to their characteristic angle. "And you?"

"Too much," he said, with a laugh. "Some day, I'll make a confession."

"It's such fun to play with you, Monte," she said brightly. "And now, please, say some nice things to me. No one can say them so nicely as you."

"To-night — if we are alone."

"No, no — and *no!*" she said, so delighted to refuse him that she punctuated each rising negation with a tap of her parasol.

"What a strange emotion it would be to you," he said in the same light tone, "to do just one thing you wanted to do — one thing unconventional — to dare once!"

"Undoubtedly, but I don't intend to do it," she said complacently. She looked at him a moment and said, "Were you very much in love with Irma?"

"I tried to be."

"I don't think she's ever gotten over it."

"You mean she's not gotten over my getting over it."

"Do you suppose that's the reason she would n't come to-day?" she said, looking down at the tip of her red parasol and thinking of the compact she had once sworn not to trespass.

"Dellabarre's in a bad state."

"Really? But he's always been, has n't he?"

"Not like at present."

She felt the conversation was slipping from the subject which interested her. She glanced out over the flurried back of the Sound. Far off, the low outline

against the horizon was growing out of the gray void, the tiny towers of New York, shooting up like reeds emerging from the water. Another boat or two breasted the foam and cut sharp trails; a yawl with brilliant sails stood out in dazzling whiteness against the infinity of blue. All at once, the prospect of the *matinée* ahead lost its anticipated zest.

"Somehow, going into a stuffy theater does n't appeal to me," she said dreamily.

"Why do it, then?"

She glanced ahead significantly.

"There are others."

This time, he suggested no alternative.

"You said something rather puzzling a moment ago," she began slowly, leaning over the rail and flirting with the swirl of the cleft waters, one hand extended.

"What?"

"You said you tried to be in love with Irma. Why *tried*?"

"Because I am a great comedian — though I don't know it at the time."

He had the instinctive sense of drawing women on without seeming to make any effort to attract them. He was in love and he knew it, though he still was ignorant as to the extent to which he had let himself go. He felt that he had played too easily into her hand by giving her the opportunity to refuse his request, and he determined to regain his supremacy.

Any glanced at the group in the bow. Tody Dawson was covertly watching them. She shifted her chair to shut him out, rested her chin on her hand, and said,

"Why do you tell me that?"

"Just to play fair," he said carelessly. "We are both much alike — rather irresponsible children."

"Go on."

"You really want me to blacken myself?"

"I am interested."

"You say I play well. I do. I have too much curiosity, I suppose, to be really able to love. I am curious about women. I want to delve into their minds and, when I have done so, I end by being disillusioned. I fool myself. I always have, and I probably always shall. That's why I say I am a great comedian."

"And you have nothing on your conscience?"

"No. I think I understand the sort of women I am thrown with. They want to be amused until dinner-time," he added, smiling. "Women of the world, if you wish, but without depth to hold a real wound. I come into their life — in their need of amusement — on the same basis as their dressmaker, the cabaret, or a new variety of Pekingese. Some men are deceived by looking into their eyes. I'm not. Sometimes," he added, with gathering amusement in his eyes, "sometimes in a humorous way I like to consider myself as an avenger of my sex. Very conceited, is n't it? But awfully frank. Now you know the worst about me."

She perceived that, under pretense of confession, he had been amusing himself with a description of herself.

"I don't like you when you are ironical," she said, when he had glanced at her for her verdict. She rose and summoned Kitty Lightbody and the boys, to whom she made amends by being particularly gracious. But during the matinée she was so bored that when Kitty alleged the need of an errand, she accepted the excuse gratefully and they separated to meet at Lazare's for tea.

"Shall we go there directly?" he asked.

She hesitated.

"I'd like a bit of fresh air. The theater was dreadfully close."

He called a taxi, assuming to have understood her wish.

"Twenty minutes' run in the Park. We'll be the first at that."

He helped her in, took his place, and waited for her to decide the note of the evening. She looked up, caught his waiting expression, and, despite her first intention, began to laugh.

"War or peace?" he asked, relaxing.

"You can be so horrid," she said, pouting.

"Don't try to be the conventional coquette then," he took up instantly. "You're much nicer than that."

She turned away hastily to hide her smile. Then, after a moment, she said gravely,

"Are you always such a great comedian?"

"I believe so," he answered solemnly.

"But I could n't go home with you alone to-night," she protested.

"Of course not — I only objected to the way you refused."

"What was wrong?"

"You should have answered, 'I can't, but I'm dying to do it.'"

"Well, but that's true," she said frankly.

When they reached Lazare's, Amy was in a mischievous good humor. Daughter of Eve, the taste of stolen fruits was sweet.

"I hope they'll be late," she said, with shining eyes.

"Amen."

Lazare's was already well filled. They passed

among the tables in the central hall, seeking a quiet corner. All at once, Amy stopped, with an exclamation. Ahead down the aisle, directly facing her, was Irma Dellabarre.

"Monte, do you see her?"

"Irma? Yes."

"The wretch! That's what she's up to!" she cried, delighted. "Well, this time, I've caught her!"

She hurried ahead with merry eyes, her curiosity bubbling over. The next moment, she stopped, incapable of word or movement. The man whose back was toward her was Andrew — her husband.

III

TO go forward and find some glib word of greeting, to master herself and hide the rushing consternation which swept over her seemed impossible, and yet she did it. The shock was too unexpected, the situation too inexplicable for her to comprehend it. What she did comprehend was that she was in the midst of a hundred acquaintances who were watching her and that a false step meant a public scandal. She felt the leaping heat in her cheeks and her voice sounded strange to her ears, but she went on, and said cordially,

"Well, this is a surprise!" Then she added incoherently, "How are you?"

Irma Dellabarre was quite self-possessed.

"It looks terribly dramatic, does n't it?" she said, smiling, "but it's quite simple. I came in, after all, and the first person I should meet was Andrew."

"Of course, my dear!"

She knew it was a lie, and, despite herself, momentarily she gave a note of scorn to the exclamation. But instantly she caught herself. Husband and wife looked at each other, each cut to the quick at the humiliation they had to stand and take unflinchingly before these sudden strangers.

"I did not expect you," she said, to say something, and she looked at him in order not to look at Irma. "Are you coming out to Chilton?"

"Perhaps," he said coldly, looking at her steadily. "I thought you were in a party."

"Yes, we are," she said slowly. To stay longer was humanly impossible. "Well then, I may see you — at Chilton?" She nodded and went down a ways to where the head waiter was standing at a table for two.

"Table for five, please," she said sharply, mistress of herself as she had been the night of the fête, when Tody Dawson had blundered in the minuet. She saw some one bowing to her in the haze of things, and bowed with a smile in the general direction.

"Sit down here," said Monte Bracken's voice. She took the chair he indicated, with her back to her husband, and drew off her gloves slowly, a mist before her eyes. The waiter stood at her side for his orders. She was not aware of his presence.

"Tea and buttered toast for two," said Bracken quickly. "Or — no — might as well make it for five, Philip," he added, summoning the head waiter, who knew him. "Leave word at the door where we are. Mrs. Lightbody will join us."

Then he sat down.

"Talk to me," she said. "Keep talking to me."

Gradually, under the pleasant sound of words which she did not comprehend, she regained her self-control.

"Thank you," she said, drawing a long breath, but her eyes remained on her plate. "It's strange Kitty does n't come. What time is it?"

"Half-past five."

Not for an instant had she the slightest doubt that Irma had lied to her. She had seen the truth in Andrew's eyes in that bitter moment of mutual humiliation. How long had it been going on? All her

anger was directed toward the woman. Yes; she had taken her revenge threefold!

"She was n't embarrassed at all," she thought bitterly. "Quite delighted, of course."

"Tea now?"

"I don't see why they don't come," she said nervously.

"Kitty never is on time, you know."

"Yes; but I *want* them to come," she said dully. Andrew must see all the difference that existed between his situation and hers.

"They may be waiting outside. Shall I see?"

"Please."

She thought of the anger she had shown in the first shocked moment of recognition. That had been a mistake. It had only played into Irma's hands. She should have stayed and shown her indifference, treated the situation with lightness, covered up the wound to her vanity. What a delicious revenge she had given Irma!

"What a fool I was!" she said angrily. "But she shan't have him alone."

To be forced to continue her little game under the eye of the wife would be the last thing Irma would relish.

"She shan't have things her own way," she said determinedly, and rose. The thing to do was to accept Irma's declaration that the meeting had been accidental, and force them, under appearance of cordiality, to join the party. To her consternation, when she turned their table was empty. She was still standing when Monte Bracken returned.

"I am sorry — they have n't turned up."

"It does n't matter now," she said abruptly.

He glanced at her brilliant eyes and feverish cheeks, wondering just what to offer.

"I'm afraid they won't come at all," he said slowly.

As a matter of fact, from the first he had never expected that they would turn up.

"It does n't matter," she said impatiently.

"Curious thing," he said, frowning. "Do you know whom I thought I saw just now? Rudy himself!"

"But he's in Chilton," she said, answering him mechanically.

"He was this morning," he replied thoughtfully.

Her imagination was racing. At one moment, she repeated to herself what she should have said to them in the first moment of her surprise. The next, it jumped to the future, constructing the scene of her reproaches to Irma — the way she should demand an explanation from Andrew. The next moment, she switched to the past with feverish alarm, seeking some remembered indications which could clarify the present unbelievable revelation. Andrew — Andrew of all men! She could believe all things but that!

"I'm afraid the others have gone off on their own boat," he repeated. "What do you want to do?"

She passed her hand hastily over her forehead, touched her lips to a glass of cold water, and said,

"If you don't mind, Monte, I think I'd rather have a bite to eat now and go right home. I'm sorry to be so stupid."

"Do anything you like," he said hastily, moved by the suffering in her eyes. "We can dine here and go back by the train?"

"By the train?" she said, perplexed. "And why not by the boat?"

"I prefer not, Amy," he said kindly.

"Oh, I see what you think," she said slowly.

They ate their dinner rapidly. He saw her perturbation and refrained from addressing her. When the meal was ended, she said, out of a clear sky,

"I prefer to return in the yacht."

He shook his head.

"You are not in a mood to decide," he said gently.

"I don't want you to do a thing you'll regret."

"You don't understand the situation," she said, looking at him. "It has nothing to do with Andrew. My husband and I have been nothing to each other for months."

"Are you sure?" he said gravely.

"Quite. Yes; I am upset, mortified, hurt, but it's not on his account. It's — it's to be deceived by her."

"Really, I had rather we did not go back alone," he said frowning.

"But if I wish it?"

"Very well."

She glanced at him.

"You are not annoyed at me?"

"I could n't be."

"Please don't be annoyed, Monte — whatever I do."

In the antechamber, an idea came to him. He stepped in the café for a quick glance. He had not been mistaken. At a corner table, huddled over his glass, was Rudolph Dellabarre.

IV

ANDREW was already home, in the broad, gabled cottage he had taken for the summer. By the time they made the landing, she had not the slightest doubt that he would be there. Irma would have seen to that. If she had any one to thank for even this momentary return, it was the woman's need of safeguarding appearances. She gave her hand hurriedly to Monte Bracken.

"You are very kind," she said gratefully. "Good night — and I shan't forget how you've been."

"I will do anything I can — at any time — for your happiness," he said, in a low voice.

He sprang back on the deck; the yacht backed out, and she watched it glide over the silky waters. At the bow, silhouetted against the tapestry of stars, his dark figure continued standing, still looking back at her. He had been very much of a gentleman, tactful and respecting her reticence, the true Monte Bracken of the finer metal that occasionally flashed out below the adroit and brilliant *flaneur* of the world. He had left her in long silence to the tumult of her own emotions.

"It's Irma — Irma I can't forgive," she repeated to herself dully, in long contemplation, as the shadowy goblin palaces of New York, the fiery lacework of vaulted bridges, the crowded throngs of electric lights fell behind and sank into the waters of the night.

Across the bay, a few sentinel-lights followed their shooting progress — faint and distant as all mankind in the complexity of the stars which hung from the firmament above her and swam up from the deeps below. What did she really feel? Was it only the treachery of a friend? At times, she had felt the tears wet on her cheeks — tears of bitter disillusion, she had told herself.

The veranda and the parlor were ablaze as she came slowly from the pier.

"Mrs. Lightbody and the others will be home later," she said to Gregory.

"Mr. Forrester has arrived, madam."

"Mr. Forrester? How long has he been home?"

"About an hour, madam."

She waited a moment, half expecting some message from her husband, a demand for an interview, and then went up to her room, dismissing Morley as soon as she had removed her hat and ulster. Would he come to her? The odor of tobacco was in the upper hall. He was awake.

At the end of ten minutes, which seemed an interminable hour, she made up her mind suddenly and going to his door knocked.

"Who's there?" said her husband's voice.

"It is I."

"One moment." She heard him moving hurriedly inside. "All right now. Come in."

She entered. He had been in his shirt-sleeves at his desk and had stopped to slip into a dressing-gown. A year ago, he would never have thought of that.

"Come in," he repeated calmly. "Room's pretty heavy with smoke. I'll open a window a moment."

She stood by the door, watching him uncasily.

"Why, he is n't angry at all," she thought, troubled, "unless he is concealing it very well."

He closed the window, but, perceiving the lighted cigar on the desk, crossed over.

"I'd better get rid of this, too, I suppose," he said, tossing it into the fireplace.

She felt like screaming out,

"Good heavens, don't be *polite!*"

But she controlled herself and murmured, "Thank you."

Whatever happened, she was determined he should not have the satisfaction of perceiving the slightest trace of irritation. She refused the chair he indicated — to remain still was impossible — and going to the mantelpiece, she rested her arm on the ledge in an attitude of coquetry which had become unconscious.

"I did n't expect you back before the end of the month," she began lightly.

"Yes; I got off earlier than I expected."

"Then things are going better?"

"In a way — thank you."

"I am always glad to know something of your affairs," she said quietly.

He threw himself into an armchair, crossed his legs, caged his hands and looked at her.

"I am sorry you left Lazare's so quickly. I wanted you to come back with us."

He did not reply.

"It was a wonderful trip; the night was heavenly. I don't know when I've ever seen the stars so beautiful," she added, trying to rouse his jealousy. "I am sorry you missed it — particularly because Kitty went off on some wild spree and I did n't want to come back alone with Monte."

"Why not?"

The simple question threw her into confusion.

"On account of appearances, of course. I prefer not to be talked about like some other wives we both know."

"I see."

"I am getting nowhere," she thought, before the calm of his attitude. How long had this intimacy with Irma been going on, and how serious was it? These were two things she must learn at all costs.

"So you have suddenly blossomed out into a lady-killer?" she said, smiling at him.

"I beg your pardon."

"So you are having a flirtation with Irma Dellabarre," she said, holding the smile with an effort. She felt that she had her emotions under perfect control, but to him her eyes shone out like angry coals.

"I do not intend to discuss Mrs. Dellabarre," he said coldly.

"You won't pretend that her ridiculous story of meeting you by accident was the truth!" she burst out, all restraint gone.

"I have nothing to discuss," he said precisely.

"No, I should say not, because you know she told a lie and a stupid lie," she cried, in a passion. She was convinced that Irma had lied, but she wanted to know if he would go to the extent of a lie. "Whatever I do, I do openly. I don't need to hide it. I don't —" She stopped. Her voice was shaking, and her eyes dangerously filled with tears. In a moment, she continued bitterly, but with more calm, "I hope you enjoyed the mortification and the shame of our meeting like that — being humiliated before others."

"What do you object to?"

"I object to deceit — to underhand methods, to a woman who pretends to be my friend in public!" she flashed out.

"Oh, that's it," he said thoughtfully. "You, of course, don't object to my friendship with another woman."

"Friendship!" she exclaimed angrily. "You need n't tell me it's just friendship. You're not that kind. If you see a woman like Irma, it's because you're interested — really interested. You are not a society hanger-on, indulging in light flirtations."

"Thank you for the distinction."

"No; you care, and you care a great deal!" she rushed on. She felt that she was showing her worst side, but she could no longer restrain the passion of wounded vanity, jealousy, and anger which flamed up. "Well, at least let's know where we stand. How long has this been going on?"

"I don't intend to discuss this," he said again.

"But I do intend," she cried. "Can't you see in what a mortifying, humiliating position you have placed me?"

"I quite understand that you resent being humiliated," he assented. Then he said gently, "Unfortunately, you made the decision."

"I?"

"You know what I mean."

"Good heavens, you are not going to drag in that poor fool of a Tody Dawson!" she cried, every nerve on edge.

"I am simply recalling to your mind," he said, in the businesslike preciseness that she hated, "that I was once as sensitive to being humiliated as you are now. You speak of appearances. According to appearances,

my servants had heard a man tell me a lie in my own house. They were free to draw any conclusions they pleased. That was appearances, I believe."

"This can't go on!" she said abruptly, her head in a whirl. "Andrew, we can't go on like this."

"Probably not."

She left him and walked to the window, flung it open, and closed it again.

"Listen, Andrew," she said, in another tone; "let's call quits. Let's begin all over again. This sort of life means nothing to me. I am willing to give up seeing any man you object to — all men if you ask it —"

"Even Monte Bracken," he said instantly.

"Even Monte Bracken."

"If I give up seeing Irma."

"That is, of course, the condition. Will you start fair? Begin anew?"

He was silent, looking at her such a long moment that she grew restive under the stern glance.

"It is n't any real repentance. It is n't any real love of me," he said to himself. "It is just wounded vanity. She will sacrifice any one or anything to revenge herself on the other woman. That is it."

"Well?" she said impatiently.

He shook his head.

"What! I offer all this and you refuse?"

"I refuse."

"Why?"

"Because Irma Dellabarre's friendship means a great deal to me in my life and I don't in the least intend to give it up."

"Ah, there now we have it!" she cried. "Why go on pretending. You know you are in love with

Irma Dellabarre and you believe she is with you! I knew it — I knew it!”

“Amy, I have already said to you,” he began, without anger, “that I did not intend to discuss Mrs. Dellabarre, and I won’t. Furthermore, I do not recognize that I owe you any explanations for my conduct or the reasons for my friendship.”

“I don’t admit that!” she cried.

“You will have to admit that,” he took up in the same quiet tone, “because you are the one who has brought this situation about.”

“I?” she cried in protest, for, strange to say, she had not the slightest conception of her own responsibility.

“You. I prefer not to go into recriminations and complaints. It is now too late for that. You have created the situation. I have accepted it. In a way, our position is not different from many marriages of our kind. You have had complete liberty and I have determined to have mine. I do not intend at the present moment, just because your vanity is wounded, for that’s all it is, to change my attitude, because you demand that another woman should be sacrificed. Go your way and don’t interfere with mine.”

“Andrew,” she cried desperately, “we can’t go on like this! We have got to understand each other. Let us tell each other the truth. You don’t love me any more, do you?”

“Naturally not!” he said, plainly surprised at the question.

She had expected a protestation, grudging, half-hearted, indignant even, but still a protestation of affection. It had never once occurred to her, even in the constraint and estrangement of the last months, that

her husband could ever cease to love her. She put her hand suddenly to her eyes as though the thing he had said was a specter she could shut from her sight.

"Very well," she said slowly, and mechanically she repeated, "Very well." All the vitality of her anger deserted her. She felt weary and worn, while he watched her curiously, marveling. "That is at least frank," she said, looking at him at last. "Then, of course, you are in love with Irma. Say it."

"I prefer not to discuss that," he said quietly, "but I will say this: If Irma Dellabarre were free, knowing what I do now, of what marriage should be, of what I wish in a wife to respect and cherish, I should be honored if Mrs. Dellabarre would be my wife."

"I understand," she said, in a low voice. "I knew it. I knew it from the moment I saw your eyes. Well — now I know."

"Yes; now you know," he said. His glance, which had never left her, continued without passion on her. "And now that you know — what are you going to do about it?"

"What?" she said, frowning and staring at him, as though she could not translate his words into her comprehension.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know," she said slowly. She frowned again, staring at the hand which lay on the mantel as though the whiteness of the skin had offended her eye.

"It is, of course, for you to decide."

"How immovable, how hard you are!" she said, her voice hardly intelligible, and a shudder passed over her shoulders.

"Yes; that is so," he said gravely. "I was willing to give all — I will not give half-way. Don't think I

have n't suffered. I have. But — I don't intend to hash over what is done."

"You say for me to go my way," she began, with an effort, clinging to a last straw. "How far do you wish me to go my way, Andrew?"

"I have said I will accept any situation you may propose," he answered. "That ought to be plain to you. You have your self-respect. I count on that. You bear my name. So long as you continue to do so, I am confident that you will treat it with respect."

She began to shiver. Her head felt of lead. She was alone — alone in the immensity of the world.

"I think — I think I'd better go to my room," she said incoherently.

He sprang up instantly, as he would have done to a stranger. She went blindly toward the door. But all at once, before the snapping of all the links of the past, before the mystery beyond, she turned and stretched out her hand toward him.

"Andrew — it can't be — it can't be true!"

"It is true," he said resolutely. "To pretend would only make matters worse. Don't deceive yourself either, Amy — you do not love me; you have not loved me; you could not have loved me!" he added, with more force; "or it would never have come to this. Be as honest to me as I am to you. That is all I ask."

She bowed her head suddenly and went out. He had beaten her at every point.

When she had left, he shut the door carefully. Then he came back to the desk and buried his head in his hands, torn by the thought of the suffering which he had been forced to inflict on the woman he had loved, who, in her moment of defeat, had looked at him with the wounded eyes of a child.

V

THE next morning Andrew Forrester was up with the sun and out for a morning gallop. The first thought in his mind was how to arrange to see Irma Dellabarre. For see her he felt he must after the decisive events of the night. Until the explanation with his wife, he had not been quite sure of his own sentiments, but the declarations he had made gave a note of finality, an answer to the perplexities which had existed in his own mind.

He had burned the bridges behind him and every instinct now impelled him to the other woman with a strength which surprised him. For there had been moments of irritation, of grave doubts in the intimacy which, from an accidental meeting, had grown into a deep confidence.

Amy was not down at the breakfast, pretexting a cold contracted on the ride home. Kitty Lightbody and the boys went off immediately for a tennis tournament which was scheduled at ten o'clock. Every one would be lunching on the Club veranda. He seized the opportunity eagerly, had Gregory telephone the Dellabarres that he was coming and drove off in the limousine. Amy, of course, would learn of his destination, but, though he would have spared her any unnecessary affront, he felt that he must see Irma, and see her at once.

To Irma he had never put into words the emotion

which drew him to her. It was not necessary. She could be under no illusions on that score. The sense of chivalry in him would have restrained him if nothing else. Neither by word nor action had he departed from the attitude of deep veneration which she had inspired. Beyond that, he had opened his heart completely and in return he had felt that by a word here and there, a look of sadness, by a chance suggestion, she had shown him the Calvary which she endured at home.

When the car slowed up and ran into the deep pine-covered entrance, with the low vine-covered home ahead, he recalled all at once that first time, in the night and glistening rain, when he had come to its welcoming lights in company with Amy. Despite himself, he could not master a momentary pain, but immediately, frowning, he said to himself,

"No, no, that's past! That can't wound me now!"

He did not get out of the motor but said to the butler who came out smiling,

"Just say Mrs. Forrester's car is waiting for Mrs. Dellabarre, will you?"

"That was rather foolish," he thought the next moment. "It looks rather strange if I don't get out and go in."

He rose, descended, and then changed his mind. Pretending was not in his nature, and being in a false position left him irritated and uncomfortable. To give himself an excuse, he passed to the front of the car and threw up the hood.

"Do you find it carbonizes much, Bingham?" he inquired.

"No, sir. Not so much now, sir."

The door opened, he looked up eagerly. Mr. Della-

barre came out, frail, mechanical, bushy like a marionette on strings.

"How do, Dellabarre?" he said, closing the hood not to have to offer his hand.

"Is n't Mrs. Forrester with you?" said Dellabarre slowly.

"That's stupid now. Why should he say that?" he thought. Out loud he said hurriedly, "Amy's dosing up a sore throat and so to save time I ran over to get Irma."

"I understand."

Andrew came around the car. Their glances met. The appearance of Dellabarre was a shock to him. There was an unmistakable pasty look about him and the hand on the button of the jacket shook.

"There's death in that fellow's eyes," he thought, and the next moment recoiled before the sinister speculations that started up.

Irma Dellabarre, in a blue foulard, smiling and composed under a sweeping leghorn hat, came out with Mon Amour under her arm.

"Hello, Andrew! well, this is a surprise," she said, lightly offering her hand; "mind my taking the darling? Why, where's Amy?"

Mon Amour set up a yapping as he took her hand. Somehow her words grated on his ear. He repeated again the excuse he had given the husband. The situation was horribly false. He felt guilty and humiliated.

"Coming over later, Rudy?" said Irma, stepping into the motor and installing Mon Amour.

"Later, yes."

"Do. It's going to be quite exciting—and luncheon will be lots of fun. Every one will be there."

Mr. Dellabarre was still standing at attention as

the car swung into the drive. They were silent, each under the echo of the parting.

"He is in a terrible state," she murmured, looking away. They passed the gate-keeper and swung out on to the main road. She leaned back and drew a long breath of relief, passing her hand over her eyes.

"Good God, what an existence!" he thought.

The embarrassment of their mutual deception before the husband was still upon him. Before his eyes rose again the racked figure of Rudolph Dellabarre. How long would he drag out this shattered existence, he thought moodily.

"It may come all in a moment," he said to himself, "and then it may drag on for years. You never can tell. It's awful to have such thoughts — awful and yet —" He glanced at her, wondering if that sinister possibility were back of the melancholy in her eyes.

"You have had a talk with Amy?" she said, without turning towards him.

"Yes, last night."

"I supposed so."

"It was painful, very," he said, frowning.

"I'm sorry, Andrew." She laid her hand on his arm. "You have so much to bear. I'm sorry if I have made it any worse." She hesitated a moment. "Do you think it was wise to come for me like this?"

"I had to see you."

"Yes; but at the club you could have managed that. Will she be there?"

"I don't know. She was n't down for breakfast," he said gloomily. "Well — I've told her all."

She looked so alarmed at this that he hastened to add, "I said nothing about you."

"Are you sure?"

"I refused to discuss you." Then he corrected himself. "Your name, of course, was mentioned, but I said nothing about my feelings toward you. I did say that if we were both free, I should consider it an honor to have you for my wife. I said it to show the respect I felt toward you," he added.

"Yes, I see," she frowned and buried her lips in the little nosegay of sweet peas which she had in her hand. "I think you had better tell me all. Of course she did not believe that I met you by accident."

"No, of course not."

"Did you — did you admit that?"

"I refused to discuss you in any way."

She nodded in approval.

"What a pity!" she said, turning to him with sadness in her eyes. "Why could n't they leave us alone? Why spoil something that was so genuine, so real? But that's the trouble, Andrew. Now it will be so different."

He drew a long breath, and the fighting look, which was characteristic of him when he was crossed, set over his lips and his forehead.

"No, it won't," he said doggedly. "We have done nothing wrong. It is our own affair."

"How little you know," she said with a sigh.

"I think the situation is clearer than you think," he said slowly. "Shall I tell Bingham to take the long way round?"

"No, no, I would n't do that," she said hastily. "It is rather conspicuous as it is, our coming up like this."

"I'm sorry," he said gloomily.

"I don't blame you, Andrew," she said gently.

"Now tell me quickly."

When he had finished the details of his interview

with Amy, there were tears in her eyes, and she looked away that he might not perceive them.

"Yes, it was hard," he consented. "I did n't get much sleep last night. It's always hard when you come to a parting of the ways. And yet, now, frankly, it is a relief. It was all false, our pretending toward each other. For, Irma, don't make any mistake. Amy does n't love me — she has n't for a long while."

"I don't know," she said, shaking her head. "I wonder."

"I have no hard feelings toward her — now," he said slowly. "I've been responsible for much. At the bottom, of course, we should never have married, that's the plain fact. All other explanations are beside the point. I have left the matter in her hands." He stopped and then added significantly, "I think I know what she will do."

"You are quite sure that this will mean nothing to you?" she said, resting her glance on him a moment.

"It may mean everything to me," he said directly. "You must understand, of course, what I mean."

She nodded and looked away.

"You are fortunate."

"I?" he said, startled.

"You have no children," she said sadly. "Children complicate everything!"

"Good heavens, Irma," he exclaimed, "you are the one I marvel at — how can you go on?"

"And yet I do."

"But why — why?" he cried. "Every one knows the situation. No one would blame you." He checked himself. "I won't talk of that to-day — your side of it — but you must have considered possibilities."

"Considered! Of course, of course!"

In the distance he saw the lazy pennants of the Yacht Club and the thronged piazzas.

"Some time we will talk the future over honestly, without fear, — not now," he said hurriedly. "There's a big life ahead for both of us."

She did not answer. Her head bent, her glance deep in the multicolored bouquet of sweet peas.

"You understand," he said gently. He laid his hand over hers. His touch had always a magnetic power over her. She looked up at him, a smile on her lips, sadness in her eyes.

"What a pity, Andrew!" she said, shaking her head. "If I thought you could be happy with her, I would sacrifice myself — oh, yes, a hundred times over."

"No, no, not you — wait, wait a little longer," he said huskily, and his hand closed over hers in a sudden tension which woke up Mon Amour and sent him into a furious yapping.

VI

AMY FORRESTER was already in the white throng which crowded the veranda and streamed over the green lawns. She came up bravely to meet them, waving her handkerchief.

"Good gracious, what lazy people! Really, Irma, if you run away with my husband like that, I shall be getting jealous," she exclaimed loud enough for several persons to hear.

"Is she going to fight for him?" thought Irma, while Andrew was divided between irritation at an attitude which he knew to be false and admiration for the gameness with which she bore it.

"Well, she stands up to the guns," he thought gratefully. Under the merciful shade of the lace sun hat she wore, he detected the shadows of a sleepless night. Unaccustomed to the manners of society, to its stoic etiquette and its hidden sorrows, its ambuscades, its treacheries and its smiling hatreds, it shocked him profoundly to see the two women join arms and move into the crowd. He followed more slowly, revolting at the comedy he saw they would be forced to play.

"Is there an interesting match on?" said Irma mechanically.

"Yes, indeed, Tody and Jap are playing against the Bartons, one set all," she answered. The pressure of Irma's arm burned her. Yet, determined on her rôle, she said with calculated lightness, "Why all this mys-

tery, dear? Only too delighted if you'll wake Andrew up a bit. It's just what he needs!"

Despite the nonchalance of her words, her eyes fastened eagerly on Irma, seeking to learn from her expression the true state of affairs. All night long, in wakeful turning hours, she had asked herself how far it had gone? What was she capable of? Was it possible that Irma herself cared; and if she did, what then?

"Of course you'll think I'm fibbing," said Irma pleasantly, "but it really was an accidental meeting."

"And his going for you this morning was too, I suppose?" said Amy quietly. "Oh, Irma, Irma, at least play the game."

"What was I thinking of to come here with him?" thought Irma uneasily. The ring of emotion in Amy's voice made her wonder how far she could trust to the other's breeding — some women would make a nasty scene.

"Where is Monte — this morning?" she said pleasantly.

"It is serious. He has told her everything," Amy thought instantly. They were by the tennis courts, picking their way through the crowd on the lawn to their seats, which Gladys Challoner was holding for them. Above, on the elevated stand, Monte Bracken was refereeing the match. He looked up, startled, at their arrival, and then ceremoniously lifted his hat in response to Irma's fluttered waving.

"There," said Amy to herself, studying the faces which turned curiously toward them, "if any one has seen them together, he'll know now how perfectly indifferent I am to what they do!"

She did not see clearly what was happening on the courts. Tody and Jap were bounding about, indulg-

ing in antics which set the crowd in roars of laughter. She saw only the faces of Irma and Andrew at her side and at times, far off as in a mist, the glance of Monte Bracken turning toward her. When the match ended and the crowd rose to return to the veranda, Kitty Lightbody, jubilant at the victory of the boys, came up rapturously.

"Was n't it grand, my dear; was n't Tody just splendid? I won a hundred on them, bless them!" She drew Amy aside and whispered, "Well, you might thank me!"

"Thank you? What do you mean?" said Amy. She was watching Irma.

"For leaving you alone with Monte, of course," said Kitty, astonished.

Amy was so irritated at this unwelcome reminder that she lost her temper.

"Kitty, don't be a fool! You know perfectly well that I'm exceedingly annoyed at what you did."

"Annoyed!" said Kitty, so startled that the china eyes rolled comically.

"Certainly annoyed. You made a very embarrassing situation for me. The last thing I wanted was to go home alone with Monte Bracken. I don't see how you could have been so thoughtless."

"But, my Lord, you need n't be so fierce! You were n't really alone," said Kitty indignantly. "And say, look here, who wanted to get rid of Tody in the first place?"

Amy was aghast. She had blundered again.

"I'm sure I did n't mean to be cross," she said hastily. "Forgive me, but I particularly don't want to be talked about, as you ought to know."

She left Kitty Lightbody, still murmuring in her

astonishment, and went in quest of the others. She had already forgotten her, her mind intent on surprising the two in some revealing moment. Bracken was talking to Irma. During the morning he had studiously avoided Amy, divining the irritation his presence might bring. She came up restlessly.

"Monte, you lunch with us — get a table for four!" she said, determined to carry out her part to the end.

"And Kitty and the others?" he said, seeking a way out from this tragic intimacy.

"Oh, they'll manage for themselves!"

He started to object, saw how agitated she was, and finally bowed acquiescence. "Yes, very glad to."

She would have liked to have carried Monte away from Irma, but for fear of showing too much eagerness she left them and went up herself to select a table.

Andrew was standing on the steps talking to Mr. Gunther and a group of the older men, who were listening to his exposition of Mexican affairs.

"He looks his best in flannels," she thought from habit. He looked particularly well to-day, holding himself well, speaking with authority — among men he was some one. She started to join them, but the thought that she would be welcomed as *his* wife stopped her. She turned back, forgetting her errand and returned to Irma.

Lunch was a torture. The two men sat gloomily listening to the chatter of the women who faced each other across the shining cloth, smiled, fenced and acted for their benefit, with unnatural gaiety. Amy suffered profoundly, more profoundly than she had ever remembered, yet she consoled herself with the thought that she was inflicting a greater humiliation.

She had but one idea — to keep them constantly under her supervision. It was a martyrdom she imposed on herself. So determined was she to carry it through to the last drop of bitterness that with the end of the afternoon she called Bracken to her.

"I have something to ask of you," she began — "something disagreeable."

"What is it?" he said, watching her anxiously.

"I want you to go back with me in the car."

"With — with them?"

"Yes."

"Good heavens, Amy," he exclaimed in revolt, "you can't do that — flesh and blood won't stand it!"

"Yes, I can. I've made up my mind to. I'm going to carry it through to-day, through to the bitter end!" she said in a lifeless voice. "She shall enjoy what she's done. After to-day, I don't care what they do — but to-day I have a right to punish her!"

"Amy," he said earnestly, "I beg you not to do that —"

"And I am going to. Will you come?"

"It's not an easy thing you ask of me," he said abruptly.

"I know — will you come?"

"If you insist — yes," he said after a moment.

But this last torture was spared them. Rudolph Dellabarre arrived in his motor skiff and Irma, seizing the providential way out, announced that she would return with her husband.

From the veranda Amy and Monte Bracken watched the little cockleshell of a racer go shooting out around the pier, Dellabarre at the wheel, Irma standing well up forward, looking away from them.

"I wish she'd drown!" she said to herself bitterly,

seeing nothing but the slender figure against the sheen of water.

"Better go back in a party — all of us," said Monte Bracken at her elbow. They were a little apart from the crowd which was breaking up, automobiles departing, motor boats streaking over the bay.

"Yes, I suppose," she said wearily.

"You are very tired."

"Very."

"Listen, Amy," he said suddenly, carried away by the pain of seeing her suffering. "I'm going to say something to you, and I don't want you to answer me. I want you to hear it, that's all. Don't turn around, but listen. It's a tough moment for you, God knows. I understand more than you think. The whole world's breaking up. Now, I want you to have something to cling to. I want you to know where I stand. Perhaps I should n't say this now. It's a horrible thing to say such things. But I feel you need to know one thing. Whatever turns up, count on me. No, don't say anything that would spoil it. If you need me — when you need me — I am ready, that's all."

She did not answer, nor did her glance leave the motor boat which had now dwindled into a speck. At most her lips tightened a little, and a breath went through her body.

"Do you understand?" he asked, touching her arm. Despite all he had announced, he watched her, hoping for a sign. He repeated. "Do you understand, Amy?"

She nodded, a faint, almost imperceptible nod. She did not speak. She did not look at him, her glance still out among the waters of the bay at a shadow that fled.

VII

THE next weeks passed on the edge of a volcano. Andrew came and went. Outwardly there was no sign of anything changed between them. The house was always full of gaiety, and the occasions when they were left alone were rare. At times, by accident, they met, and each time in his eyes was the same waiting question:

“What are you going to do about it?”

This constant intimacy, this estrangement in the crowd, was hard enough; but what was worse were the days when he was in New York, when at the last moment came a telephone that he would not return for the night. What did he do in the city? Was he seeing *her*? Her pride forbade her to inquire directly, but by a dozen subterfuges, through Kitty or the boys, she followed the movements of Irma Dellabarre. From the evening on the veranda of the yacht club, when he had declared himself, Monte Bracken had studiously avoided seeking her. When she saw him at a dinner, on the bathing beach or at a dance, he came up to her immediately, and in his eyes, which questioned her steadily, she read the same question:

“What are you going to do about it?”

She held them from her, these two men, and examined them calmly, without prejudice; for it seemed to her that she was playing with life and death, and that in her hands were the destinies of both. Monte Bracken appealed to all the fallow sources of sentiment

in her. With him, every instinct of enjoyment awoke. She felt his understanding, his complete sympathy, the comradeship of every desire and every impulse. She said to herself that she did not yet love him, but immediately she admitted that to do so would be the easiest thing in the world, and to love him meant all the romance of youth that had escaped her.

Her husband she saw clearly for the first time. From the beginning she had had no feeling of resentment toward him. A great feeling of pity moved her. She wished to protect him against himself. How could he be so blind? Yes, she had failed, failed utterly in her relations toward him. The crisis at which she stood was too great for her to deceive herself about that. She had meant nothing to him — and he deserved so much! He was fine all the way through. He had not even reproached her, when he had every right. But Irma — how could she surrender him to Irma? Irma, of all women — Irma, who was only playing with sensations, who dramatized herself, who had no profounder instincts than the staging of her coqueties. What had infatuated him? What could he see in Irma, who saw *her* so clearly? The best thing perhaps would be to hold on for a while until the veil had lifted; then if he wanted a divorce and the opportunity to find some woman who would give him a true home, she would do so gladly, with only the kindest of feelings. But when she came to this inevitable conclusion of her problem, her head burned and her eyes were wet with tears.

“I don’t love him! I wanted to love him, but I can’t — I can’t!” she assured herself. “We can’t make ourselves do that! But I respect him and I admire him — yes, even more than Monte. I don’t want

any more unhappiness to come to him. Oh, if I could only see him happy — I should not feel this terrible remorse!"

The only one being she did not understand was herself. Why this hideous thing had come to her she could not comprehend. The idea of divorce frightened her, like all the unknown steps in life. Her standards, her judgments, her prejudices, were a sample of the collective opinions of those who surrounded her. What would be their attitude toward her? Would she have to go abroad and live in some mingled ostracism of Europe? She searched among her acquaintances, and when she found some one who had been divorced she hastened to invite them to dinner, watching them with the curiosity of a child, trying to divine whether at bottom they were really happy — if they suffered from the feeling of the world's criticism.

The evil shadow in all her struggles toward an honest recognition of her duty was the thought of Irma Dellabarre. Irma had taken her revenge; Irma was the element that aroused all the worst in her, — Irma, who stood as her rival, not only in the present of Andrew, but in the past of Monte Bracken.

She had tried to put Monte out of her thoughts. She was afraid of him; not of his brilliant side — the mind that awoke her mind, the dramatic touch about him which captured her imagination — but the gentler side, the exquisite deference toward her, his tact, his patience, and the longing in his eyes to hold forth his hand, the deeper side of the man which she had reached; the Bracken who, since the night of their return over starlit waters, she knew loved her. In the end she yielded to the need of knowing him at hand. When he was in the room she had a sensation of elec-

tric strength to which she went avidly in the utter weakness of the loneliness in which she wandered. Every day, somehow or other, she managed to see him, but always in the presence of others, and at times when she thought no one was watching, her eyes fastened themselves on him — his destiny, his happiness, too, lay in her hands.

And then, abruptly, without prearrangement, a week when Andrew had been called West, the solution precipitated itself.

It had been a dry day in July, but toward the evening a little breeze had set the bay to rippling and the evening had been delicious. They had gone for a sail in Bracken's racing sloop, the *Water Sprite*, a marvel of light grace and speed, which he was preparing for the races at the end of the month. From the glowing decks Kitty and Amy, stretched in an ecstasy of languor, dozed in feline daydreams. Above them, the white spread of sails flattened against the brittle blue sky. Across the wrinkled waters, moving like a fairy wraith, Challoner's rival yacht, the *White Streak*, slipped easily at their side, with Gladys and Irma lounging at the bow. Between the two men an intense rivalry existed, which the fleeing boats seemed to comprehend in the swift coquetry of their agile manoeuvring, the sweeping descent on each other for an attempted blanketing, the challenge of the right of way which brought them from time to time in perilous proximity, only to glide easily away under a swerving tack.

From where she lay under the creaking boom that passed and repassed in the light breeze with the ease of a swallow's darting, Amy Forrester, through half-closed eyes, watched Monte Bracken. He was bare-

headed, the dark hair a little loose about the temples, the tanned throat and arms revealed in the creamy shirt, a pipe in his mouth, his body balanced against the slight tilting of the deck, where below, a beaded edge of watery lace curled on the flurried blue. From time to time he gave a staccato order to a sailor at the ropes, studying the set of the topsails or watching with appraising eyes the answering challenge of the *White Streak*, jibing, tacking, flinging out a great, lazy balloon sail, testing the qualities of his adversary. Yet in all this solicitude of the master, occasionally his glance came back to her, rested a moment on her half-veiled eyes, lit up with a smile, passed and returned again.

Life with him would be very like this gliding ease, she thought, pleasant and drawn on languid breezes. When Andrew was away and she was no longer racked by the thought of imagined meetings with Irma Dellabarre, she yielded to the charm of this personality, and there were moments, as in this glory of the rosy setting of an untroubled day, when she felt in the momentary meeting of their glances depths of feeling which surprised her. Life would be pleasant with Monte Bracken — even now she could not think of it without him, without a feeling of rebellion. To-day there was a new longing in her, a longing that came to her, disturbing and delightful, a thrilling impatience against the very reserve and deference which he held toward her with such fine courtesy — a reticence she did not feel always in his glance.

Something new, something that she had never known, stirred in her as the gossamer sails stirred and swelled above her against the blue deep.

With a waving of scarfs, the *White Streak* gave

way and sped toward the Dellabarre anchorage up the bay. They took in their balloon jib, tacked and made the dock.

"Lordy, I love sailing when it's like that!" said Kitty, jumping up with a sigh of regret. "I say, Monte, I'm dying to make some money. What do you think — can I back you against the *White Streak*?"

"Backing myself pretty heavy, Kitty," he said confidently. In their necessity of an amiable third, he had come to almost a liking of Kitty Lightbody.

"Then I'll take up Gladys at evens!"

"What are you doing to-night?" said Amy, in a low voice, when Kitty had been propelled to the wharf.

"I had promised to rush over to Claire's."

"Come to dinner instead," she said impulsively. "To-night I feel I need you around."

"You want me?" he said, looking into her eyes eagerly.

"Please — will you come?"

"Of course."

The supper was on the piazza, by the light of candles. They had not much to say, speaking in perfunctory sentences, content to let Kitty Lightbody babble on. Tody and Jap, who were due for the week-end, had telephoned that they would be down after dinner. At nine Kitty went off to the station to meet the train, leaving them on the covered porch with its far shore lights and the lapping of waters below. The butler returned to clear the table, and in his presence the unease they felt became unbearable.

"I say, suppose we get a bit of air while Gregory tidies up," he said, rising. Gregory was almost the eye of the husband.

"It's stuffy here," she assented. They passed across the lawn to the edge of the breakwater. The tide was low, and below the pebbles shone in the obscurity. Occasionally a wisp of air, damp from the bay, struck across her face like a moist cobweb.

"It was selfish of me to ask you to break your engagement," she began slowly.

They stood apart — consciously.

"No, it was not that."

"It was so quiet this afternoon — out there. You understand things so well, Monte. It's good just to have you around."

She said it without emotion — a child afraid of loneliness.

"Thank you."

His quiet acceptance reassured her. She could indulge herself. With him she was sure to be understood, sure of his patience and his unquestioning loyalty. She looked down at the beach, seized with an impulse to go skipping along the flat rocks like a child.

"Come on!" she cried, and made for the steep steps.

"Be careful, Amy, it's slippery!" he cried anxiously from above her.

"Oh, I never fall," she said recklessly, but at that moment, in the darkness, a stone turned under her and she gave a cry.

"You see!" he said, catching her arm.

"Then give me your hand."

His hand closed over the one she held to him, as she balanced on a ledge. She went several steps and then stopped.

"No, I've had enough of that," she said in a different voice.

She tried to draw her hand from his, but he held it firmly.

"Monte!" she said hurriedly. "Monte, don't do that!"

"I beg your pardon," he said, releasing her instantly.

Free, she had a feeling of terror. Her heart was beating so that she thought he must hear it.

"I don't like it here — let's go back."

"As you wish."

In her hurry to avoid the touch of his hand again, she sprang ahead and up the steps to the embankment, but at the top her scarf became caught in a ledge of rock, and before she could release herself he was at her side.

"I'm caught, I can't see how!" she said, her heart fluttering.

"Let me try."

He bent over so close that she felt a suffocation in her throat, a giddiness in her head.

"There!" he said at last, straightening up.

She whirled, but the motion was again an unfortunate one, for it sent her scarf flying about him, where it caught on a button of his coat. The next moment she heard, as in the distance, her name called once, twice — and then everything went tumbling around her. She was in his arms, powerless to move. A feeling of terror and of joy swept over her. His eyes were looking down into hers, coming closer and closer. She could not cry out. She could not struggle. She felt a sudden pain across her heart, her eyes closed. It had come — an accident had decided for her. And then he kissed her.

That wild unleashed kiss burned her lips and cut across her soul like the sting of a lash. Something

primevally rebellious rose up. Her brain cleared. She flung back her head. Her arm struck violently against his lips.

"Let me go!"

No longer helpless, but strong with the strength of anger, she wrenched herself free and stood from him, trembling in every limb.

"How could you — oh, how could you!"

She tried to speak — she tried to voice the scorn that rose unreasoningly against him. Words choked in her throat. This had been no kiss such as Tody Dawson had stolen. During the one instant of giddiness she had lain in his arms, seeing and hearing nothing, she had been under the absolute mastery of his will, dominated and crushed.

"Why, Amy!" he began in wonder, and in the darkness she felt his hands coming toward her.

"Don't touch me!" she cried furiously, striking his hand away. "Don't you dare!"

"Amy!"

"Oh, what a brute you've been!" she cried hysterically. "You, whom I trusted — *you!* And this is the way you protect me — the way you respect me!"

"Good God!" he cried in amazed protest. "But I love you!"

"Love? No! That's not love! You've made me despise you — despise myself!"

"Wait!" he said hurriedly. "You don't know what you're saying — you can't, it's impossible!"

"Impossible? I've never been so humiliated — so hurt — and by *you!* Oh, to think that this could happen to me!" All at once she gave way and fell back against the wall, shaken by sobs. He stood stern and silent, without attempt to justify himself, waiting.

"Are you yourself now?" he said, when at length she had grown quiet. "Are you calm enough to listen?"

"I am," she said coldly. Of course, now he would seek to justify himself, to entreat her pardon.

"You said," he began slowly — "you said you despised me." He waited.

"Do you mean what you have just said?" he asked, in a tone which should have warned her.

"I do — exactly as I have said it!" she cried. At the moment her only thought was to humble him as he had humbled her before his sudden strength.

"By heavens!" he said with a flash of anger. "I beg your pardon — I guess, I see — well there's only one thing to do. I'll rid you of my presence — and at once."

"I am glad you can at least perceive that!"

"My dear Mrs. Forrester," he said, wheeling around as though he had received a blow, "I think you don't quite understand my reasons."

"There's no use in trying to justify —" she started precipitately to say.

"Justify? Hardly," he cut in. "You seem to quite misunderstand the situation. I have not the slightest intention now or at any time of excusing myself for having, in a moment beyond the control of any man who loves, lost my head in a perfectly human way."

"It is useless," she cried loudly, to still the feeling of uneasiness which was creeping over her. "There is no excuse, none!"

"I'm sorry," he said in a low voice. "I had another ideal of you. I didn't think you were like the other crowd. I thought there was something genuine in you

— something that would mean something to some man.”

“ You have no right to — ”

“ Oh, yes I have. I have the right to say this, for I have protected you in trying moments. In the moment of your trouble I offered you everything — myself, my name, only after you gave me clearly to understand that you and your husband were on the verge of separation. That is something for a man to offer — to put at your feet, without demanding an answer. If I have made a mistake, you have led me to it ; you have tried me beyond what a woman has the right to try a man. But understand this : when I offered you what I did — I did it in the belief that your feeling was not simply one of calculation, but that your heart was in it — and that you had a heart ! ”

“ Monte, don’t ! ” she cried, recoiling and covering her face. She had never been able to see herself, nor to comprehend her own motives, and when some one laid them before her without mercy, she was always shocked.

“ I beg your pardon, I did n’t mean — I should have gone without saying such things — but it’s been — well, rather a shock ! ” He laughed, and said with forced gentleness, “ The trouble is, Amy, you really are like the others — Irma and Gladys and the rest. You want to play with something you don’t understand, something you don’t need in your life. You’re willing to take everything from a man and give nothing. You can’t understand what you do, because you can’t feel yourself. Well, to me that’s more immoral than the woman who sacrifices everything because she does love. Possibly I am wrong in that opinion, but I hold it.” He drew a long breath, and when he continued,

his voice was even again. "You see, I am not a manikin. I am not a Tody Dawson. No, I can't make any excuses. If I lost my head to-night, honestly, blindly, like a human being, I had every right to do so. A woman who really loves does n't act as you do — and if you don't love me and were only playing with my life like that, then Amy — " He stopped, checked the hot words on his tongue, shuddered and said, "I must n't say any more, it's dangerous. Well, I think I understand now. Good-by."

What! He was going — he was leaving her, when every word he had said had convinced her? Her head turned, she felt herself reeling. She stretched out her hand.

"Monte!"

He was already up the path, swinging rapidly with great strides.

"Monte, don't go like this — Monte, listen to me! Monte!"

She ran after him a few steps, faltered, and suddenly her knees bent beneath her. Then she was alone, huddled against the side of the veranda, helpless and weak. In the distance the sound of his retreating steps ceased on the gravel path.

VIII

THE day of the yacht races a storm came up unexpectedly and by ten o'clock a nasty sea was on, with the wind still freshening. Several skippers, after a searching of the sky and a contemplation of the churning course, prudently withdrew. By the pier, a group in yellow slickers was discussing the prospect, a large element arguing for a postponement. Challoner and Bracken, however, having declared their intention to attempt the course, race or no race, an announcement was made that the test would be held. Of twenty-one boats entered, only five decided to stay, and in the sheltered waters the crews set to work on the busy preparations.

"Well, Jack," said Monte Bracken, as they went down to the landing wharf together, "this is the kind of weather that 'll show 'em up."

"It certainly will," said Challoner grimly. "Bet stands?"

"A thousand; yes," said Bracken carelessly. "But winner to finish the course."

"Understood! Want to take another five hundred my tub comes in and yours does n't?"

"Why, yes, Jack, that's a good bet."

A little flurry of rain came across the troubled water of the anchorage, flinging sharp pellets into his eyes. He pulled down the brim of his slicker, shouted an order to the crew, and went back toward the clubhouse on a restless impulse which he did not acknowledge

to himself. Under the porch the spectators had gathered, the women in great coats and ulsters, the veils whipping to and fro about their shoulders. He saw his brother and Claire, who came hurriedly out of the crowd.

"Is it a race?"

"Sure it's a race," he said cheerfully.

"What the devil are they thinking of?" said Allan, with an oath under his breath. "Monte, you're not going to be fool enough to try it?"

"My dear Allan, that's just what you can always count on my being," he said with a grin. "Want to come?"

"Thanks, no — I prefer to stay behind and inherit your property."

"You'll have a chance," he said instantly. "Well, the *Water Sprite* has n't a show, but it'll be good sport. You see, there's a bet up," he added, lowering his voice, "and I'm not the one to drop out with the odds against me."

"Do be careful, Monte!" said Claire. She had been standing silently until now.

"Careful?" said Allan. "He's just as apt to get out under full sail with a spinnaker set."

"Well, no, hardly that," said Bracken, with a glance at the bay, where the blue waves with foaming crests were storming from the northeast like gallant battalions surging to the attack.

"Do be careful!" said Claire Bracken.

"There's not as much danger as that," he said cheerily. He glanced up the piazza and added, "Tell Kitty she'd better hedge; the *White Streak* is the boat in a wind like this."

He went into the locker room, taking the long way

around, his eyes eagerly on the crowd. Irma and Gladys were there, but Amy Forrester had not yet arrived. Since the night by the breakwater, he had fought desperately to put her from his mind. He had told himself that the break was final, that after the words he had pronounced, no further intercourse was possible. He had not spared her in his mind. He had assured himself again and again that it was fortunate that he had found her out in time, while yet he could withdraw from the chasm of servitude which opened at his feet. She was like the others he had known, those virtuous wives, without constancy or depth, to whom the passions they inspired were but a pastime and a variety. He had believed her different. She was not; the same light emotions sufficed, the same dread of appearances bound her. He had never sought an intrigue, but a love which would give purpose to his life. He had deceived himself as he always deceived himself. But when he had heaped up all these reproaches against her, when cruelly and bitterly he had shown himself that she was only inconsequent, light, and a creature of style and fashions, there still remained one thing he could not destroy — the charm that her memory exercised irresistibly over his imagination. When she was absent, the sun was out of the day and the world a vast and desert place.

“Why the deuce have I got to come up here just to get a glimpse of her,” he said to himself angrily, “for that’s what I’m doing, damn it — I might as well acknowledge it!”

He returned through the crowd, still seeking the light and graceful figure which was the thrill of the day to his eyes, and went down to the wharf, where the crew was waiting for him impatiently.

"Five minutes to the first gun, sir," said Oscar, his sailor.

"That's enough."

He stepped into the dory and passed on to the deck of the *Water Sprite*, which was tugging at her hawser like a restless racer. He took the wheel, and the boat, released from its mooring, shot across the waves. At this moment he looked up and saw the Forrester car turning into the club grounds.

"She has come!" he thought joyfully. "She could not stay away!"

"Don't know whether she'll stand so much sail, sir," said the sailor, with a glance up at the mast.

"Don't think so either, Oscar," he said, "but one thing's certain: if she can't, we have n't a ghost of a chance of winning this race, have we?"

"Well, damn it, but there are other races!" said Oscar, mumbling to himself.

"Don't worry!" he said joyfully. "I'll get you back. What's the time?"

"Twenty seconds more, sir."

"We'll tack, then." He shouted out his orders, the zest of the struggle sending the fighting blood pulsing through his veins. If the mast would hold, he'd make a bid for it — now that he knew she was there watching. She too had suffered, for in the end she had not been able to stay away.

Amy Forrester, in fact, had had no intention of coming. Pretexting an indisposition, she had kept to the cottage for days. She knew that in the end she must see him, and yet she recoiled from it. She had waited, hoping that he would come, but as each day succeeded she realized that the decision lay with her.

"What is left for me to do?" she asked herself again and again in the quiet of the waking, in the hollow of the afternoon, in the long, tortured sleeplessness of the night. If he had only stayed after his outburst of indignation there in the dark garden by the breakwater, there could have been but one answer. But he had gone, and now it was not the question of a dramatic impulse, but of deciding three lives coldly, without emotion, after long consideration. That was the difficult thing — to make the decision herself and not to have it made for her — not to be able to yield to forces of the moment which would sweep over her emotions.

"What am I? What sort of a woman am I?" she asked herself wearily, in the isolation she imposed on herself. Never had she held the mirror to her soul and looked into its clear verities. Now, there was no escape; no subterfuge would suffice. She could not shift the responsibility. The decision lay in her hands alone. "If I see him again," she admitted to herself, "I must go to him, I must leave my husband. It's either that, or never to see him again!"

Monte Bracken had told her the truth, as Andrew in his chivalry had refused to tell her. She counted for nothing in this world. She had only been playing with forces she did not understand. It was all frightfully immoral. She had seen it in Irma, in Gladys and a hundred others — the selfishness and the cruelty. She had never seen it in herself. She had deluded herself with sophistries. She had believed that she sought only friendships and lulled her conscience with the belief that she ought to exercise a good influence in these intimacies.

Andrew was right, too, in what he had said and in

the things he had left unsaid. She had never counted in his life. She had been disloyal. She had allowed men to make love to her; more, she had sought that tribute. She had wanted to be surrounded by flattery and adulation. And the worst was, she had never intended to give anything in return. She had cheated always. The capturing of her prey had been sufficient to her needs. She had adored it until suddenly she had discovered that Andrew was doing the same thing. Then she had been willing to stop, if only he would stop! That, too, had been cheating, and all her reproaches, likewise.

"Am I as bad as that? What is wrong with me?" she asked herself.

Once she had the longing to rush over and lay her confession before Claire Bracken — Claire, with her calm and peace of soul, who saw her without illusions and without harshness.

"Ah, but I know what she'll say to me," she thought, "and I can't, I can't go on with Andrew! It is n't a question of duty — of self-respect; it was a blunder — a blunder, when neither of us realized what marriage meant. Besides, if I did wish to go on — it is too late. It would n't be fair to Andrew!"

Yet she thought many times of what Claire had said, seeking for some qualifying excuse. Why had she been brought up to believe that she was a privileged person? Why had she been taught life was the pursuit of pleasure? The harm had been done before she had even married Andrew, in her *débutante* year, when the wardrobe of a princess had been lavished on her, when she had lived the disorganized life of a *demi-mondaine*, when week in and week out she had burned up the night until four, five and six o'clock in the

morning, and that ceaseless, tumultuous cramming into the first months of all the pleasures and surprises that should be spread through life, had left in her the fatal heritage of excitement, a craving to go on, the horror of being alone. The pursuit of pleasure; that was all she had been taught — that was all she knew!

At times when she saw her own figure clearly she shuddered. What was she to do? Be selfish, be weak, hold to her respectability and Andrew? Suffer the sting of humiliation and see Monte Bracken, with his fine scorn, go out of her life? Pick up the old threads, play the old, inconsequential games again and again? Find new admirers? Be a little more clever in keeping them outside the bars that would protect her timid conscience? Or would she have the strength to set Andrew free and marry Monte Bracken, defiant of the world, but proud in her self-respect?

“But do I love him — really love him, as real women love?” she asked herself in the distress of her mind. “Am I capable of loving any one?”

And there her debating with her conscience always ended.

On the day of the race she had not yet found her answer. Kitty and the boys, who were down for the week-end, had gone over, leaving her to the solitude of the house. Yet something Jap had said had remained in her memory.

“Holy cats, if they race in this gale, half of them will go down!”

“Race? They won’t race! They are n’t lunatics!” Tody had replied.

She knew enough of Monte’s daring nature to know that no risk would hold him. She went uneasily out on to the little porch which gave from her bedroom.

The wind was howling around the corner, tearing the flower bed with its raking fingers. Above, the swollen clouds went bowling down the stormy heavens, and across the bay white lashes fell upon the angry back of the waters. It was n't possible that they would let the race go on! And if they did? If Monte went out in bitterness and despair?

The thought struck her cold with fear. She dressed frantically, and jumping into the car, hurried to the clubhouse. She had hardly reached the crowd before the starting gun boomed out. The next moment the *Water Sprite* and the *White Streak*, gunwales awash and skippers high in the sky, were sweeping over the line.

Those who saw the race never forgot the suspense of those short hours. It was a foolhardy thing to attempt in the gale that was shaking the sky, and before the first leg was run, all but Challoner and Bracken had refused the risk and had come staggering back to harbor. The wind was blowing in drumming puffs, — a gale from the northeast. The first leg was a reach, close-hauled. From the clubhouse top, where the crowd, braving the flurries of rain, was massed, the two boats could be seen rushing over the crested waves. At times in the hollow of a trough, one or the other momentarily sank from sight, and each time as the white sail climbed out and up, a sigh of relief came from the crowd.

Amy stood without cover from the occasional splashes of rain, encased only in a tarpaulin which some one — was it Tody, or was it Jap? — had thrown about her. She needed no one to tell her of the game with death which was being played out there. The

quiet, the muttered solicitude of the crowd, the long, unflagging tension, told her all. Monte was out there in the agony of the storm. What had she been in his going?

"Turning the first buoy now," said a low voice.

"Who's that around?"

"The *White Streak* — no — yes!" said some one with a telescope.

"Monte's around, too," said Allan Bracken with a terribly calm voice.

"That's over — one third's over!" said Claire.

"One third's over," Amy found herself repeating. She understood nothing of the comparative danger of the different legs, but she could understand that one third was over — one third!

She was standing between Claire Bracken and Irma Dellabarre, drawn by a common feeling of impending doom, the instinct of the animal when the breath of death passes in the air. Their faces were white and staring, too — yet she was not conscious of them. Once, at a cry from the crowd, she swerved against Irma without noticing it. One thought obsessed her. Could she control herself, even — even if the horrible thing should happen? Could she stand there, as she must, without crying out and revealing all? She shut her eyes. Why was not the second third over? Far off, two white specks, like handkerchiefs, were dipping in and out of the whipped sea, lost in a sheet of foam.

"Why don't they get nearer?" she said helplessly.

"Second leg, the tack takes longer," said Claire.

"It's the last, the run home is the worst," said Allan under his breath.

"What do you mean?" she asked sharply, turning to scan his face.

"The last is running before the wind," he explained laboriously. "Danger is —"

"Hello!" some one shouted. "By George! Thought he was over that time!"

"Danger is," continued Allan Bracken, "in possibility of jibing, and they're both carrying too much sail —"

"The *Water Sprite*'s held her own this leg!" said a voice.

"They'll both make it on this tack."

"Wow! There she goes!"

"Who's around?"

"The *Water Sprite*, by Jove!"

"Look at the wind grab her."

"Mast won't hold — never in the world."

"The *White Streak*'s around!"

"She'll pick up the distance now!"

"Look at them come!"

"Two thirds — two thirds gone," said Claire; then to her husband, "Is this, the last leg, really the worst?"

"Yes," he said shortly, "with Monte at the wheel!"

Amy closed her eyes, afraid to look. A prayer went up in her tortured mind. If only he would come back safely — only back to life again, she would go to him openly. Anything rather than to have the horror of remorse on her conscience!"

"Topsail's gone — torn to tatters!"

"Whose?"

"*Water Sprite*."

From the bending peak the split sail streamed out in white jets. The *Water Sprite* was carrying too much sail, much too much sail for such a gale as this, but it was her only chance to win, for the *White Streak*,

bigger and steadier, was running away from her. At times the booms went soaring into the air, threatening to jack-knife, and each time an involuntary cry went up from the waiting spectators. Amy stood, eyes shut, unable to face the suspense of the awful last moments, feeling the perilous approach from the excitement about her and the voluble comments.

"What the deuce is Monte standing in for like that?"

"He's pulling up."

"Sure, but he can't make the mark without going around, and then where'll he be?"

"That's true, but he's figuring on some time allowance."

"Even then, the *White Streak* will be over before —"

"She's over now," cut in some one, as a gun boomed out and some mechanical voice announced "12:42 exactly."

"By George, Monte's sailed a great race!"

"Yes, but he has n't a chance!"

"Glory Hallelujah! Look at the *White Streak* run!"

The *White Streak*, first over the line, swept like the flash of a searchlight into the harbor, running wild, the crew bailing desperately, Challoner cramped against the wheel. Down the course the *Water Sprite*, which had made the second buoy a minute behind its handicap, came tearing over the frothing sea, carrying every inch of canvas that the mast would hold. And presently Monte's intention became plain.

"By the Lord Harry, he's going to jibe!"

"In this gale? Never!"

"He is — he's going to jibe! Watch him!"

“Good-by, Monte, then.”

Something beyond Amy's control forced open her eyes. She understood that this was the decisive moment. She looked down over the slated roofs, beyond the neck of land into the yellowish sea, into the saucer of fury, where the *Water Sprite*, like an inhuman, frightened monster, was rushing on. She could see the crew bailing frantically, she could see even *his* face, a white smutch in the rushing confusion. He was going to attempt something, something foolhardy and like Monte Bracken, the dramatic. And the next moment it came. In order to pick up precious seconds and not to pinch her, Bracken had come down under full sail to the leeward of the mark. To come around and take his sail on the other side and thus around the mark, meant the loss of the seconds he needed. One hundred yards from the finish he prepared to jibe her in a gale that was blowing thirty to thirty-five miles an hour.

Some one, in the tension of the moment, grabbed Amy's arm in impulsive excitement. A shout went up, as the sail, under the deft handling of the crew, came slowly in.

“Look out — look out now!”

“Here she comes!”

“Wow!”

With a report like a cannon the sail shivered, jibed and filled, shaking the boat as though it were a leaf. They heard Monte's shouted oath in the wind. The next moment mast, sail and all went by the board! A cry went up from the onlookers. Irma Dellabarre fell against her heavily and slipped to the floor. What had happened? Amy saw her, and then her eyes met Claire Bracken's.

"What's happened? Is he — is he dead?" she said, staring at her.

"I don't — I can't see!"

"Man overboard!" cried a voice.

Some one pushed them aside, jumping up on the chair.

"No, no! I can make them out — they're all there, I think — one, two — four — five!"

"Boat's smashed to hell, though!"

"Clean ripped to pieces."

A piece of the sail, whipped into shreds, slapped up against the roof, rose and slid away over their heads, a thing that a moment before had been over *his* head. The *Water Sprite*, with the crew clinging to its sides, drifted slowly over the line — half a minute too late!

"Is — is he safe?" she said faintly.

"Yes, now he is safe," said Claire quietly.

And again, woman to woman, they looked into each other's eyes, while about them, relieved of its tension, the crowd grew vociferous.

"By George! Just made it at that!"

"Another five minutes and they'd have sunk."

"Spunky devil."

"Fool thing to do."

"Bet up, I suppose."

Amy Forrester went down with the crowd, elbowed and carried along down to the pier, where the men were coming up, — Challoner and the crew of the *White Streak*, dripping and exhausted, and presently up the steps came Monte, acclaimed and fêted — Monte, who had done the dramatic thing, but as always, had come in second. She went to him directly and held out her hand resolutely, without flinching.

His eyes had been waiting for her from the first. They said no word — her look and the answering comprehension in his were enough. Each felt the solemnity of the act — the decision once and for all.

IX

TO Andrew Forrester, too, the situation had grown intolerable. After the explanation with his wife he had waited day by day for the only decision it seemed possible that she could make. Any other — to go on living under the same roof when they had come to recognize that they had ceased to love each other — was in his philosophy a spiritual slavery. Yet the thought that she shrank with pain from the decisive word hurt him more than he could have believed. He had loved her, she had been part of his life; he could not remain indifferent to her. That she still hesitated, he ascribed not to any vestige of affection for him, but to a timidity before the censureship of that world whose vassal she had become. Each day in the mail he looked eagerly for a letter from her that would tell him that her decision had been made. The suspense wore on him. At times he feared for his own strength, that he could be tricked sentimentally into a belief that he still loved her.

Then there was the other woman to whom in his loyalty he felt bound. She had her right to happiness, too. For never for a moment had he a doubt that once Irma knew him free to act, she too would free herself from the long horror in which she had lived. Della-barre's condition had become so shockingly apparent to every one that no action of hers could surprise. What wore on him was that everything in his situation was horribly false, the assumed attitude before the

world to Amy, the mask he was forced to wear when he offered his hand to Monte Bracken or Rudolph Dellabarre, and last, the prohibition Irma had placed on their intimate meetings. Every day that this masquerade continued it seemed to him that all of them lost something of their pride — were a little soiled by ugly contact.

He arrived at Chilton three days after the yacht race. That night there would be the weekly dance at the yacht club, and he had come down impatiently, knowing that there at least he would have a chance to meet Irma Dellabarre. An hour after his arrival Amy had said the words to him which he had been waiting for, and yet which struck him cold with their suddenness. She had chosen the moment when the porch was gay with callers at the tea hour, to leave her guests and signal him.

"Little private consultation with the head of the house," she said in laughing explanation.

They went down the piazza and turned the corner, where they were hidden from the chaffing and the gossip which buzzed behind them.

"I wanted to say to you, Andrew," she said, without preliminaries, "that I have come to your point of view. I have decided that there is nothing else to do but to separate and divorce. That is what you wish, is n't it?"

He was taken back by the suddenness of her announcement. Why had she chosen such a formal moment for so mortal a thing? To steel herself against crying out? To surround herself with the discipline of the world — her world? That must be it.

She repeated her question, looking up into his face.

"Yes, that is what I wish," he said gravely. He felt

embarrassed before her calm. He added awkwardly, "Thank you."

"It is best for both — the only thing. What I have decided to do I will let you know later."

"When?" he asked gravely.

"Perhaps to-morrow," she said, hesitating. "And perhaps sooner."

He looked at her, wondering, inclined to question, restrained by a feeling of generosity.

"I have been rather a failure with you, Andrew," she said hurriedly, and then stopped, a lump in her throat.

"Don't!" he said hastily. "That's all too trivial now. Let's be generous — both of us — now."

"Yes, of course —" She turned away, started to speak, shook her head; and he, seized with the cold horror of seeing her tears, said hastily:

"Be careful, Amy — they're — they're here."

"Yes, thank God for that!"

"And it's no use saying anything — we understand."

"Of course we do."

She stood a moment, her hands resting on the balustrade, smiling down at the canterbury-bells which stretched their dainty cups up to her. Then she left him and went humming back to her guests. He had no such power over himself. He turned and went to his room. He did not attempt to see her again alone. They dined in company of others and went off to the club. It was all distressingly tragic — and so needless. He had not expected to suffer as he did, nor that she would quiver under it. Whatever else came, they had been man and wife — and there had been moments of unshaken faith!

They dined at the Challoner's and went over to the Yacht Club for the dance. Amy's composure amazed him. Whatever her faults, she met a crisis like a thoroughbred. He had endured the dinner gloomily, conscious of his equivocal position, exaggerating the malice that he believed in the eyes of every one. At the Club he drifted away into the billiard rooms, where the smoke was hazy and the green tables under the hooded electric lights looked like green valleys dropped far below him. The talk was all of war in this shattering first week of August, 1914, and in the stupefaction of the imagination social lines disappeared. He listened to a group in the corner nearest him, who were arguing that a conflict was inevitable, and from time to time, as phrases detached themselves, he frowned.

"What do you think?" said a man next to him, whom he did not know.

"There won't be any war," he said obstinately. "Germany's trying to bluff France into deserting Russia."

"Paper to-night says they've started through Belgium."

"That's only a feeler, too," he said, frowning. "When they find England's in it too, it'll all sputter out. The Germans are n't fools enough to tackle that combination — you'll see!"

"Hope you're right," said his neighbor nervously.

"Of course I'm right," he assured himself. "The thing was too incredible — two thirds of civilization drenched in blood! Never!"

"If it did, think what would strike the stock market!" said his neighbor with a huge sigh.

Forrester had been thinking of that, too. More than once in the past days he had felt an impulse to sell out

and take his losses. But he was not a speculator who plays for the shifting of the wind. He was an investor who had been speculating — an investor who held to one idea obstinately. Then, too, the unfolding drama of his internal life had obsessed him to the exclusion of all other considerations. He was convinced of the sanity of his judgment when so many others were swept by hysteria, yet the doubt that rose shrilly about him was disconcerting. The stakes were heavily against him if the incredible should happen. He rose and drifted back in search of Irma. He jostled some one as he avoided an outstretched cue, and turned to apologize. It was Rudolph Dellabarre, of all men!

The accidental meeting gave him an unpleasant sensation, for his nature was a frank one, and, coveting what he did, it was repugnant to him to face the weak eyes which had the right to accuse him.

"Beg pardon. How are you?" he said gruffly, passing hurriedly, to avoid giving his hand.

"Wonder what he'll do?" he thought, despite himself. Then he snapped his fingers angrily. What became of Dellabarre was the one thing he did not wish to consider. After all, Dellabarre was a failure, a miserable, weak failure, and must take his punishment.

"We have a right to our happiness," he said, thinking of Irma. "Even for the children's sake, she should leave him!"

If only he, the husband, had been of man's stature and strength, if he had the sensation of taking her from an equal —

The feeling was so strong that he could not go from him to her; the thing was repugnant. He saw Irma, caught her eye and smiled, and his face, untrained in

dissembling, showed too plainly his happiness. Then he turned for a stroll on the piazza. Again Dellabarre crossed his path.

"That's strange! Why is he here? When he's in that condition can't he stay at home?" he thought angrily. "Confound him, is he following me?"

He seated himself on the railing, crossed his arms, and, to convince himself, watched Dellabarre, who continued aimlessly to wander back and forth, avoiding recognition. Finally he perceived Forrester's look, straightened up and went off hurriedly.

It was almost midnight when Forrester finally found his opportunity in the thinning crowd.

"I've been waiting to see you," he began in a low voice.

"Be careful," she said in warning, "and don't show so much on your face; others are looking."

"Walk outside, then. It's vital—I've got to talk to you!"

She hesitated, searching a moment in the crowd with an unease which she hid behind her fan, before taking his arm and moving down to the shelter of the summer-house that jutted over the water. From the first look into his eyes she had guessed, not what news he brought her, but that the inevitable moment had come when she would have to set him right, readjust him to her own changed caprices. She did not like these inevitable moments of reckoning, that always left their little sting. She would have avoided explanations altogether, only she was afraid of the crudity of his nature, afraid of the social blunders he might commit.

"Well, now for it!" she said to herself, summoning up all her wits. After all, he was a man and could be handled like others, without ruffling her moral coiffure.

Distressing scenes were so musing — and she had the feline need of appearing neat in her own eyes — and in the world's.

"At last!" he began precipitately.

"Be careful, Andrew!" she said in warning.

"Voices carry over the water. It's rather imprudent."

"Imprudent?"

"There has been a good deal of talk about us."

He broke in, sweeping aside trivialities.

"Well, it's done; we separate and divorce!"

It came to her as a shock.

"I — I did n't believe she would," she said slowly. This complicated the situation decidedly.

"She has and — I admit it — she's been very decent. Well, you can understand what this means to me."

She felt the demand that was coming, and sought desperately to turn it. She had long ago realized her true feelings, as she always did after a little pardonable self-deception in the first delights of a new adventure. She was not insensible to the electric quality of his vitality and stubborn strength. Free, she might have married him. The trouble was that she had adopted an attitude toward him that she had found a constant effort to maintain — the attitude of the maternal, ministering woman. Frankly, it bored her now. Curiously enough, when she examined herself dispassionately, she admitted with a laugh that, of the two, it was Amy who was necessary to her.

The game had interested her. Now that she had won, all her sympathy was with Amy — the sympathy of one woman of the world toward another. That Amy had taken it so to heart weighed on her conscience. She had revenged herself for Amy's trespass-

ing, and now she felt kindly disposed. Then she missed her; she was sympathetic, a good companion, a truly intimate friend — and intimate friends are rarer than adorers, and harder to replace.

“You have suffered a great deal,” she said mechanically, still seeking her attitude. “I am glad — very glad for your sake!”

“The last weeks have been hideous. I felt everything I did was a lie. Well, the thing is cleared up. I’ve not said anything to you until I knew I had the right, Irma. I respect you too much, but, well — I guess we both understand! Now I want you to end this hell you’ve been living in!”

“How do you mean?” she said faintly.

“Leave your husband and start a new life. The rest is easy. There is n’t a court in the world would refuse you a divorce!”

“Divorce!” she cried, so surprised that she blurted out the truth. “Oh, never! I could n’t do that!”

He stopped point-blank, not believing his ears.

“I can’t — I can’t!” she cried, recoiling as though she were clearing her dirty skirts from the filth of a threatening scandal. “I never thought of such a thing!”

In the darkness she felt that he was staring at her, so still that she could not even hear the taking of his breath. Alarmed at this ominous silence, she laid her hand on his arm.

“But, Andrew, why? What made you believe that? I never thought of such a thing — I never said a word.”

Still he made no answer.

“He is suffering,” she thought, and her emotions inclined her to pity. She would have the tooth out and

the consolation afterward. "If we were free, both free, to-day, of course I'd marry you — you know that. But that's not the point!"

"What is the point?" he said brusquely.

"Why, other things. We are not living in a prairie. There are my friends — my position in society — what people would say."

"Does that mean anything to you?"

"Yes, of course — everything."

He put his head down into his hands and began to laugh — a laugh that made her shudder at the nudity of her soul which she had exposed to him.

"Listen, Andrew," she said, pleading against this silent arraignment. "Don't think I don't care. I never meant to do you harm. I'm weak, perhaps — but that's what I am. I am what my surroundings have made me; I can't be different."

"And I am a *parvenu*," he said mercilessly.

"No, no," she protested. "You are much finer than I am, than we all are. And then — and then —" she said incoherently, "there are the children —"

"Of course, the children," he said dryly.

"Oh, Andrew, don't be angry with me. I can't help it if I am as I am. If you despise me I don't know how I shall go on. You don't know — you don't know what it is. You can't understand. You force me to say what is terrible — what I hoped you'd spare me —"

"And what is that?" he said, in the tone of a prosecuting attorney.

She hesitated a long moment, and then she laid her hand over his.

"Wait!" she said in a tragic whisper. "It'll only be a short time now."

He looked at her and saw her as she was. She felt again the baring of her soul before him, and she struggled to hide behind the cloak of plausibility.

"It's terrible, what I've said; but that I've been willing to say it should convince you —"

"Of what?"

"That I care," she said in a low voice. "All I ask is to be protected. Do this as a man of the world would do it, Andrew, and all will come out in the end."

"I see."

She breathed a sigh of relief, assuring herself that she had convinced him.

"You are such a child in worldly matters, Andrew," she said softly. "A man can stand up against slander. But think what it would mean to me just at present to have my name dragged through the mud."

"And, of course — the children," he added.

She drew back, started to speak, and stopped.

At this moment, outside on the gravel path they heard a crunching sound.

"Say something — talk to me —" she whispered.

"Despite which," he said, raising his voice, "I am certain that England cannot stand quietly by and —"

In the darkness the steps came nearer.

"Hello, is that you, Rudy?" said Irma, breaking in. "I'm here with Andrew."

The steps came to them, and in the blurred light a short figure loomed in the entrance to the summer-house.

"Are you ready to go home now, Irma?" said her husband, and the voice that reached them quavered unsteadily.

"Goodness, no! So early?" she cried, jumping up. "Don't worry. Andrew's here. He'll take me home; you need n't wait, dear."

Andrew Forrester stood up.

"You'll have to excuse me," he said. "I'm off early to-morrow. I'm turning in now myself."

For a moment no one spoke. Had she dared she would have touched his arm in mute entreaty.

"Well," she said at length, in a tired voice, "if every one's going, I suppose I might as well. Is the launch here, Rudy?"

"Yes — here," he said thickly.

"We can put Andrew down at his wharf."

"Thanks, my car is here. No need to trouble you," he said obstinately.

They had left the summer-house, making for the lanterns of the landing. She delayed purposely, letting her husband pass ahead.

"Do come," she said quickly. "I'm afraid of him lately — terribly afraid."

"I think you worry unnecessarily about — Rudy," he said slowly.

She stopped and caught his sleeve in the darkness.

"You hate me, don't you?"

He made no answer.

"I wish I were different," she said plaintively. "I wish — I wish it could have gone on just as we were, without any one knowing —"

"Don't!" he cut in harshly.

"I must see you!"

"Why?" he answered, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"You don't understand."

"The trouble is, I do understand — too much!"

They were at the launch now. There was nothing for her to do but to accept his hand and get in.

"Not coming?" said Dellabarre from the stern.

"No, thank you," he said loudly. "Good night, Irma. Good night, Dellabarre."

"Good-by, Forrester!"

The husband's voice alone replied, and the note of rising excitement made him stop short. He turned back uneasily. Was Dellabarre really worse than usual? Irma had half risen from her seat.

"Rudy — it's awfully rough! Do you think we're safe?"

"Sit down!"

The command rang out. The water widened between the boat and the dock. The motor spun and began its chugging iteration. The next moment the curtain of the night dropped between them. Forrester stood listening. He heard again Irma's voice in pleading, once, twice, more faintly. Then the chugging of the motor dwindled away.

He called up his car and went directly home. Gregory was up, waiting, and in his hand a letter which he seemed to have been holding before him for hours.

"Mrs. Forrester, sir," he said, stammering.

"Well, what?"

"Mrs. Forrester left — was called suddenly to town — She said I was to give this letter to you."

"All right, Gregory," he said gently. "Give it to me, and don't worry. I know all about it."

He took the letter and went up to his room.

"I know what that means," he said aloud.

He sat down and opened the letter.

“ Andrew — I have chosen this way. I am leaving openly, so that you can have your divorce for desertion. It is only right — for it’s been my fault. Do try to think a little kindly of me if you can — and be careful — do be careful what you do now. You have the right to be happy.

AMY.”

X

AT ten o'clock Monte Bracken had arrived in his automobile, and five minutes later Morley, pale and frightened, had brought down her mistress' luggage and seen to its storing. Bracken, who remained in the back seat without descending, made no offer of explanation.

"Good evening, Morley."

"Good evening, sir," she had replied, and to herself she thought, "He looks more like a ghost than she does."

"Put the bags in front."

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Forrester said to say she'd be right down."

"Very well."

It was all done quite openly. There could be no question of what was happening. Gregory, who was aiding with the bags, did not dare to question Mr. Bracken's chauffeur, even with his eyes. Among the servants was the terrified calm, the panic of all the senses, that comes below stairs with the approach of a catastrophe above. Morley hesitated as though half expecting some explanation would be volunteered — some plausible lie that would deceive no one. Then she ran back upstairs hurriedly, out of breath.

Amy, cloaked and veiled, was waiting by the trunks. She had been entirely calm and matter-of-fact until now, but at the last moment her fingers faltered on



“You will join me later with the trunks,” said her mistress slowly. *Page 329.*

the keys. Try as she might, she could not manage the lock.

"The key sticks; lock the trunks," she said hastily.

Morley obeyed. One lock stuck. She was quite a moment before she rose.

"You will join me later with the trunks," said her mistress slowly. "I will telegraph you in a day or so. You understand?"

"Yes, Madame — yes."

"That is all now," she said, looking around and going over to the desk. She took up the letter she had written Andrew. "You will give this to Mr. Forrester immediately when he returns. Or, no — you need not stay up; Gregory will attend to that."

She gave the letter to Morley, who stood transfixed, turning it over in her hand.

"Well, I am quite calm," she thought. "It's strange, I am doing something that is going to upset everything, and I don't feel as though it were anything out of the ordinary. I am calm, and I know just what I am doing."

Nevertheless, as she was descending the stairs, Morley came running after her with her handbag, which she had forgotten. She took it with a first feeling of agitation. She was annoyed to have betrayed an emotion before a servant — emotion which she was certain she did not feel.

She passed through the hallway. Outside, standing by the door, Monte was waiting for her. She nodded, took his hand and stepped immediately into the car. Each instant seemed long and horribly decisive. She heard them going as though a clock were ticking them off. He entered, closing the door.

"Well, I am here," she said in a low voice.

"You are quite — quite sure?"

"Absolutely."

It never occurred to her that he also might have been hesitating before the cost, before what he too might have to face. She was not thinking of him at all, only herself was important. The one thing that was important was that she should prove to herself that she had the heroism to make the great sacrifice.

"Drive on!" she heard him say. The next moment they were moving — out from the region of light into the darkness ahead.

"Well, it's over — I have had the courage," she said to herself. "It's decided now. I wonder what they'll say?"

From the moment she had come to him at the edge of the pier and held out her hand, it had all been settled. It could not be otherwise. She had seen him again the evening of the second day after, and all had been said. It was out on the veranda of the Chaloner's, where they had met for dinner.

"You know what it meant when I came to you the other day?" she said directly.

"I know."

"I came because I could not help it — because I found I could not live without you."

"I too —" he began hurriedly.

"Yes, I know — I saw," she said, nodding. "Monte, all that you said of me was true — at least, was true then. Now I ask only one thing of you."

He looked at her apprehensively, struck by the note of exaltation in her manner.

"I want to leave openly with you. I want the world

to know that it is my act — my responsibility, and that I am not afraid to take it on myself."

He was silent a long moment.

"Do you realize all this would mean?" he said slowly.

"Yes, all," she said firmly. "But I am tired of cheating, tired of being just what you told me I was. I don't want to fall back on subterfuges — sacrifice others. I want to do what I do proudly — I want to believe in myself."

"Yes — I see," he said gravely.

"And then, it is only fair to him."

"And — after?"

"I shall go to a hotel in New York — to Europe perhaps. Andrew will sue at once for a divorce on the grounds of desertion. I think it would be better for you not to join me until then. As long as I bear his name — I shan't do anything against that. You would not want me to either!"

"You have thought this all over, Amy?" he said again.

"All! Again and again!"

"When — " He hesitated, "when do you want to go away?"

"Andrew will arrive Friday — the next night."

He was surprised at the imminence of the thing, at every word she had said, at the complete assumption of his acceptance of what she had decided. Down the porch a door opened and Kitty's voice called,

"What are you two whispering about down there? Come in, you're necessary!"

"And Monte," she said, quickly, her voice growing gentle, "when I do, then you will believe that I am capable of love — won't you?"

He nodded, touching her hand lightly. He would have liked to have said a hundred things that were in his perturbed mind — but others were bearing down on them. He felt as though he were struggling hopelessly against something that could not be avoided. Every word he had said had been enforced on him — every action dictated by his code of honor, which was the Samurai creed of his kind.

XI

THE car, as though pursued by the consciousness of some guilty deed, turned and twisted through tortuous roads, throwing its searching glare into the sleeping secrets of the woods. Ten minutes, fifteen minutes had elapsed, and still they sat silently side by side, each immersed in his own thoughts. He had not bent toward her. He had not put forth his hand to take hers. The silence of the night, the guilty flight away, oppressed him — and ahead was the waking reality of the morrow. His mind had been filled with the sweeping imminence of the great events that were impending in the world. France, the country he loved with a Crusader's adoration, was on the brink of a shattering war. Men whom he had known and played at life with were turning with hallowed eyes toward the great sacrifice, the final deed of atonement that washes away all selfishness and the sins of the flesh. All these last days of July and the opening of the bleeding month of August he had had before his eyes the spectacle of the titled idlers, the play-boys of fortune, leaving their revelries; the simple, faith-borne peasants waiting in the fields; the crowded workmen scanning the bulletin board; the women listening in the night. The leaping moment of heroic regeneration was sounding on the bugle's call, and he, soldier of fortune, was powerless to respond, entangled in the trivialities of an infatuation that had mastered him. It had always been so.

"It's curious," he thought bitterly, "that with all people say against me, it is I who have always yielded with women. It is I who have followed where they would go!"

The woman he loved was there at his side, and yet something inexorable intervened between them. Perhaps it was the man's further vision that could not dwell on the present before the specter of coming consequences. He saw the headlines in the papers, the flaunting colored stories, the apposition of photographs, the whole shrieking clamor of a prying public's satisfaction in a new scandal among those it meanly envied and pitilessly pulled down. Did she realize what was coming?

"We are wounding each other — irreparably," he thought, "and yet how can I tell her?"

For she had done the thing he had believed her incapable of doing. It was mad, it was theatric — but it was from her heart. She was doing it as a spiritual rebellion, and to show him that in her awakened love she was willing to sacrifice all for him. How could he refuse that? Suddenly he bent over and said resolutely:

"Amy dear — it is a fearfully serious moment. You are sure, there is no doubt — you want to do this? Just this way?"

She looked at him in amazement. Had he read her thoughts? Yet she answered:

"Yes, yes — I do — I'm sure!"

Ever since they had fled from the house she had had but one figure before her eyes — Andrew. When would he return? Would he read her letter when it was handed to him by Gregory at the door, mastering his emotion before the servant as only he knew how?

Or would he go with it to his room? And then? What would be the emotion in his eyes, there alone where no one would be present to see? His shadow was there in the car, intruding and inexorable; his voice kept crying in her ears.

She felt like seizing the trumpet and crying:

“Faster, faster! Get it done with!”

And then this question from Monte!

What must he think of her silence? Perhaps he too was thinking of the one left behind, of Andrew. Perhaps it was a touch of remorse that held him so silent.

“Listen, Monte,” she said suddenly. “There are some things now I must tell you. It is your right to know. You may suspect, but I want you to know, so — so you won’t feel any responsibility.”

She told him of Andrew and Irma Dellabarre, of the new infatuation which had come to her husband, of his own desire that she should take this step to set him free.

“I tell you all this,” she repeated insistently, “so that you won’t feel that you or I — that we have anything to reproach ourselves with.”

“I am glad that it is so,” he said gravely. It was not quite what she had led him to believe of their relations, yet it was a justification.

“I don’t think Irma will ever do what you have done,” he said slowly, but his mind was on other things.

“Nor I,” she said impulsively. “And for Andrew’s sake, I hope not!” She explained, “I want to be generous toward him. It was not his fault. I don’t blame him — I was not the wife for him — it was a great mistake. Yet I — yet there is nothing petty about him. He has been very fine in his attitude toward me — that is why I want to see him really happy. You understand, don’t you?”

"Yes, of course," he said somberly. This mention of the other jarred on him. She really might have spared him such praise at such a moment.

What sort of a wife would she be to him?

A sudden report, and the car grounded hastily to a stop.

"What's that?" she cried, jumping.

"Only a blow-out."

He descended and went to consult with the chauffeur. It would be necessary to change a rear tire.

The accident seemed to her something ominous. She got out and walked in the shadow, while the two men busied themselves with the tires. Would it never end? Surely they would miss the train now! A whirr of motors, and she shrank back into the protection of the wood.

"If it were Andrew!" she thought, with a leap of her pulse.

The searchlights glared, swept the ground and passed.

"How foolish! What possessed me to imagine that?" she thought.

"All ready now," said Monte Bracken.

She sprang into the car before he could offer his hand, and shrank into a corner.

"Oh, do hurry!"

"Make time," he said, and got in.

"I'm horrid, Monte, but don't mind me — it is upsetting!"

"I understand, dear," he said in his quiet voice.

They were on straight roads now, and the speed at which they fled shook the car so that conversation was impossible. She was grateful for this, leaning forward, her chin in her hands, staring out of the win-

dow. Above, in the moonlit skies, great banks of clouds were scurrying.

"It does n't look real," she thought. "Just like the way they put it on in the theater."

The next moment they had made Burnham Village and swung up to the station. She sprang out, leaving Monte to bring up the bags, and ran up the steps. The platform was deserted. They had missed their train by three minutes! Monte came up, valises in hand.

"It's too provoking!" she said tearfully. "We've lost it!"

"Never mind, there'll be another soon. I'll go and make sure. I'll keep the car, we can always run in —"

"No, no — I don't want to go in the car!" she said hastily. To go in the intimacy of the car seemed to her something indelicate, something that could n't be done. He ought to have understood that!

She went up the platform toward the red, sinister lights. The night was hot and flat. Each minute that kept her from her purpose undermined her resolution. Would she be able to go through it? Even now she was seeking the obscurity to avoid a chance encounter, and in a moment they would have to enter the crowded, lighted train together!

Up the platform came a shuffling step — a train hand, with smudged lantern at his feet, smelling of rank tobacco. What was Monte doing all this time? Everything he did irritated her, even to the languid way in which he returned, when he must have known her impatience.

"Well?"

"Ten minutes, that's all."

She drew a breath of relief. But ten minutes passed, and no answering shock of steel.

"I thought you said ten minutes?" she said fretfully.

"It must be late."

"Go and see — and please don't take forever!"

First the accident to the tire, then the missing of the train, and now the third delay! It was intolerable. All at once, in the distance, a roar, a white belch of steam and along the rails long slivers of light ran down.

She started hastily back to the bags as the train came rocking in. Where was Monte? Why didn't he come? What could he be doing?

The passengers were streaming about her when he came up.

"It's not this one; this is a train from New York," he explained hastily.

"Oh!"

She turned, took two steps, and suddenly, without warning, came face to face with Claire Bracken!

XII

RECOGNITION was so swift that she had no time to protect herself. She put her head down hastily — the one betraying movement she should not have made — and fled up the platform. Mrs. Bracken stood puzzled, looking after her. The next moment she saw Monte.

"Why, what are you doing here?" she said, shaking hands.

"Going up to New York," he said hastily.

"But was n't that Mrs. Forrester?" she said, glancing up the platform at the little figure seeking the obscurity.

"That? No indeed!" he said readily.

"Are you alone, Monte?" she said abruptly.

"Absolutely — let me take your things."

"John will attend to them," she said, surrendering her bag to the footman who came up.

They stood a moment, awkwardly.

"Are you going to New York?" she repeated slowly.

"Why, yes! Is there anything surprising in that?" he said with a forced laugh.

The light was on his face, and her glance hung on his eyes. He did not dare to turn away.

She hesitated, took a step, and he began to breathe freer. All at once she turned and took his arm.

"I want to talk to you," she said quietly. "Walk up the platform with me."

He stood without moving.

"I had rather not."

"Why?"

"I cannot tell you."

"What I have to say is to be said to Mrs. Forrester also," she said with decision. "Come."

Amy was at the foot of a great telegraph pole as they came up. She did not turn at the sound of their steps but put her head down and swayed against the fence. So abject a picture of mortification and shame was she that Mrs. Bracken in pity hesitated a moment. Then she went to her and threw her arm about her shoulder.

"It is I, Amy."

"Oh, go away, please go away!" she said desperately.

"I think God has directed me to you," said Mrs. Bracken solemnly.

Amy Forrester raised her head and turned slowly, indignantly.

"Why, what do you mean?" she cried, starting back.

"It is quite evident what you are doing."

"You are making a mistake," she cried, cut to the quick. "I have left my husband's house with his knowledge and consent."

"Then you should do it alone," said Claire Bracken, more gently, "and not in this mad public way."

"Mrs. Bracken, you have no right to judge me —"

"The way you resented what you thought I might have thought, ought to open your eyes," she answered, without yielding. "And if you care nothing for your own reputation —" She hesitated. "This means, of course, that you are going to marry Monte?"

They stood faintly in the obscurity, straining their eyes — like three white shadows.

"That is, of course, what it means," she said.

"Then, Amy dear, if you are taking his name you should protect it as though it were your own."

"Oh, don't — don't try to stop me now!" The cry was wrung from her. All the long days of deliberation and soul-anguish were useless now — if the thing had to be again delayed, if she must pass through another day of doubt.

Claire took her hand in hers, bending toward her like a mother to seek the truth in the face of a wayward child.

"You child, do you know what you are doing — are you capable of knowing? You want to be free — but do you want to face all the ugly stories that will spring up now?"

"Oh, you don't understand! I must do one thing or the other — and do it now! I can't fight it all out all over again. I want to be honest with myself and — and with him!" she cried bitterly.

"With Monte? Then don't you see that you are sacrificing him?" said Claire firmly, as Monte began to protest.

Amy had not meant that. It struck her as tragically grotesque that Monte should have taken it to himself. She had been thinking of her husband, the shadow that was at her side, blending with her shadow.

"I say, Claire, you've no right to say that!"

"You know I'm telling the truth, whether you'll admit it or not to her," she swept on. "You are a gentleman born and bred, whatever you may have done, and you don't wish your name and the name of your wife dragged into every filthy sheet!"

"Mrs. Bracken! Mrs. Bracken!"

"Well, do you?" said Claire, facing Monte.

Down the track came the warning whistle of the arriving train.

The papers — the scandal written large — the ugly innuendoes! She had never thought of that, never once had it occurred to her that beyond to-night was to-morrow, with its distortion of big things and small.

"But I can't go back!" she said in a last weak protest. "If I don't go now — I'll never go," she said solemnly, looking at the man.

"You need n't return to your husband. Leave that to me," said Claire decisively. "To-night you stay at my house. To-morrow we'll see. Monte, you must go up to New York — and take care to be seen."

The train was now in sight. With a sudden obstinate squaring of his shoulders he turned to Amy.

"Amy, this is between you and me. What do you say?"

They waited for her decision, there in the faint obscurity of the platform, in the precious dwindling seconds.

"Oh, it's easy for you to do the right thing," she cried, with a sudden revolt against the calm of the other woman. "Life has been easy for you — you don't know what it is to feel the way I do —"

Monte Bracken must have felt what was coming, for he stepped forward hastily, as though to interpose between the two women. Claire Bracken stood quietly looking down, then she raised her head and said gravely:

"It's natural you should say that. But you are wrong. I had to face once the same situation — almost — that you are facing now, and I gave up what

I wanted, for the sake of others. I will tell you all that, for it may help you. I can do no otherwise, for I have the right — the one person in the world who has the right — to demand that that name shan't be sullied now." She waited a moment and then said: "You will go alone to New York, Monte. It is the first thing I have asked of you."

He stood, his glance held by her glance and the clear look on her face. A moment of judgment, of reconstruction, and the clear, enduring memory won. It was all over in a moment. He turned without a word and went up toward the station. The two women stood together watching until he had swung up the steps and into the train. They were still watching as the cars went past. He was not even on the platform. Then Mrs. Bracken felt an arm slip about her, and the next moment Amy Forrester was on her shoulder, weeping out her heart.

She made no resistance when a little later Claire drew her down the platform and led her to the waiting car, but over on the highroad she sat up with a sudden fright.

"You are not taking me back?"

"No, no. Not to-night and not to-morrow — not until you are ready to go."

"But it's over — all over!"

"Then all the more reason to do nothing on impulse. Whatever is to be done must be done with dignity, with regard for all concerned."

"I will do as you say," she said wearily. "I thought — oh, I wanted to do the right thing, the brave thing!"

Just before they came to the Bracken house, Claire laid her hand on her friend's.

"One thing — you may have misunderstood something I said. After I was engaged to Allan — I met Monte, and — well, it was a question — if I had broken that engagement Allan could not have stood up alone. We knew it — both of us. That was the decision to make."

"Hush! I feel like a criminal!" she said, drawing back — and through her tortured imagination she remembered only the look on Monte's face when he had answered Claire's request — immediately, reverently, without thought of any one else. What was she, to replace such an ideal in Monte Bracken's memory!

The next day the world was torn asunder with the catastrophe of a colossal war. The first pages were filled with headlines that cried out the tramp of mustering armies; Austria attacking, Germany declaring war, France hastily mobilizing, England deliberating, Russia moving ponderously. And on the fourth page, crowded out by the tempest in the air, a bare half-column of what a week before would have been featured on the front page:

"DRAMA IN SOCIETY ACCIDENT OR MURDER

At Chilton late last night the bodies of Mr. and Mrs. Rudolph Dellabarre were recovered from the bay."

XIII

IT was on the second morning after Amy's leaving. Andrew Forrester was in the library alone, sunk in a great chair, hands clasped before him, staring at a mass of papers on the table, which he had not touched. At any moment Amy would return to take up the comedy of respectability which they would play a little longer before the world. So much had happened in these last forty-eight hours, so much had crowded in against his waking brain, that he could not realize clearly the full measure of any one grief. All was in a daze, through which he tried weakly, patiently, and wearily to see clear. Amy had gone away, publicly, with Monte Bracken — he had her letter there in his pocket — read and re-read — the servants knew, every one must know that. But now she was coming back. She had n't eloped. She had been with Claire all the time, it seemed. What did it mean, and why was she coming back? Respectability, the great god Respectability, the god of all her kind, the god of Irma Dellabarre.

He passed his hand nervously across his eyes, to shut out a picture that intruded upon them — a pier in the mist of the night, a boat with the water widening, and a woman's voice in fear. He must not think of that, or he would not be able to hold down his nerves. For if he continued to think, he must answer that fearful, obsessing question which had been beating against his brain ever since that fatal night.

“ Was it an accident?”

“ But I — I am not responsible!” he took up wearily. “ There is no reason why I should torture myself!”

He had not affected Irma Dellabarre's life the swaying of a hair. She had loved him no more than she loved the man whom at the moment she wished to love her. He had been the dupe, the fool who had plunged from one chasm into another. Yet the retribution to her had been swift and horrible. He could not think of Irma as they had brought her in, as he had been forced to look upon her. He had loved her and then he had despised her, and yet her death had seared into his soul.

“ Was it an accident, or was it through mistaken jealousy of him that Rudolph Dellabarre had done this thing?”

There was no refuge from pain but in other trials. For there was more. The unbelievable had happened. The world had gone mad. The Stock Exchange had gone mad, and in three hours' panic everything he had had been swept away. All was to begin over. Of all the phantoms which oppressed him, this was the least. There was an acute satisfaction in the completeness of his isolation, in the knowledge that nothing could be added to the cup of bitterness and failure which he had filled with his own hands.

Outside he heard the motor. In a moment Amy would be here. Ordinarily he would have shrunk from the unnecessary pain of the meeting. Now he waited it indifferently — the measure had been exceeded — he could feel nothing more.

She came in and shut the door behind her, before he realized her presence. Then he got up slowly and said,

"I beg pardon — I did n't hear you."

The sound of his voice shocked her. She came forward, peering up into his face, so close that she could have put out her hand and touched him. He straightened up with a fighting return of pride that could not quite replace the settled sadness of his face.

She was shocked by his appearance. The room shocked her, too — the chairs out of place, the litter of envelopes spilling on the floor, the yellow telegrams trailing to the fireplace. It was so shockingly unlike the Andrew she had known. She found it harder to explain to him than she had thought. And yet she must — to have it over and to be away. She stood fighting down a desire for tears, plucking at her gloves.

"I am sorry I went away as I did," she said hurriedly, in a low tone. "I thought it was the right thing to do; I did n't realize what would have been said."

"Glad you came back," he said, nodding. "It would have been a mistake. For I want you to get the divorce —"

"No —" she broke in.

"Yes," he said, "you have been my wife — you have borne my name. Some things we can't forget. I want always to protect you. There must n't be the slightest imputation against you. I insist on that. I ask it."

He had begun firmly, he ended gently, the gentleness that comes with an overwhelming sorrow; for sorrow and happiness, in their fullest realization, are alike cleansing to the soul.

"Oh, Andrew!" she said, and turned away hastily.

"I am very glad that you came back in time."

"I did n't do it," she said in a burst of frankness.

"It was all an accident. Claire Bracken found us. She made me see!"

"Then I am deeply grateful to Claire," he said solemnly.

She turned, and without warning the cry burst from her: "Andrew, did he do it on purpose?"

He shrank back, and the hunted look flashed into his face.

"Don't!"

"Oh, I did n't mean to!" she cried instantly. "I could n't help it — I have dreamed —"

"Don't, Amy, *don't!*" he cried. He pressed his hands against his temples as though to still their leap. Then he said in a voice that fought for calm, "It is more than I can bear. It is horrible, — it is ghastly! I don't know — I shall never know! All I know is, there was no reason why Rudolph Dellabarre should have done this hideous thing!"

"But —"

"Irma Dellabarre never would have left him — for me or any other man. She could n't — it was n't in her. I tell you this to clear her memory in your eyes. I did not realize it until that night."

"But —"

"Until I knew I had the right, I had never asked anything of her. That night I realized just how little it all was to her. God! I cannot reproach her — now!"

His voice had risen in his excitement. He mastered himself, went to the mantelpiece and leaned on it, looking down into the grate.

"But you loved her?"

"Then? I suppose so."

The moment of silence stretched endlessly.

"Andrew, I shall never forget your chivalry toward me," she said, clasping her hands. "I thank you from the bottom of my heart for all you've done — and all you're going to do for me."

He stiffened abruptly, and the old demon of pride seized him. He would not be pitied by her.

"That is nothing — nothing more than a gentleman must do," he said quickly.

"No, no; don't say that! I mean it," she cried passionately. "There was so much that you could have reproached me with — and you did n't. I've been such a failure!"

His face softened.

"Those are such little things now, Amy, with what we have both got to face. They're all forgotten, believe me. There is no bitterness in me. No, it is n't fair to blame all on yourself. I've been all wrong too — all wrong!" He stopped, again caught by his pride, and added, "Just one thing — when you marry Monte Bracken — pray God to send you a child soon! It will make all the difference. The other thing is n't marriage!"

She stood fingering the papers on the table, her eyes blurred with tears. He saw her head bent over, and believing she was reading what lay there, said hastily:

"I don't know whether you heard — I have been rather badly caught in the stock market."

She raised her head indifferently — money was such a trivial thing at such a moment.

"I'm sorry," she said mechanically. "Not too badly, I hope?"

"Well, yes. The bottom, you know, dropped out of everything, and everything I had was margined — and, well, I guess it's a pretty clean sweep."

"Do you mean, Andrew, you've lost everything?" she cried, wrinkling her forehead.

"Yes, that's about it. Fortunately," he said wearily, "there's my salary, you know. There's always that. Try to be a little careful these next few months until you get the divorce."

She was staring at him incredulously. Andrew bankrupt! Andrew, who was the breath of success itself! Andrew bruised and overthrown!

"Fortunately, I placed a certain sum of money in your name when I realized that we would separate," he began. "It's not much, but —"

"Oh, don't talk of that!" she cried indignantly. She took a step toward him. "Does this mean that you — that you have nothing left?"

"Not in the bank," he said, shrinking, "but there's the salary. Half of it'll have to go to squaring up debts, but I can't starve on the rest," he added, with the simulation of a smile.

"But if — if you did n't have that?"

"I'm not worrying about that," he said, frowning, though the very suggestion brought such a panic to his nerves that he bit his knuckles without noticing what he did. "Gunther knows my worth."

"But then you are starting over — all over again," she said, bewildered.

He nodded. "Other men have done it. Don't worry about me. I'll win out, too."

The news overwhelmed her. Andrew bankrupt! What was the world without money? What could he do, all alone, without money? She watched him, dazed, unable to readjust her conception of him all at once, and slowly drew off her cloak. She looked around helplessly, still striving to seize the full import.

"I think I'll go to my room," she said, her brain in a turmoil, "I'll come back in a moment."

She went out and up to her bedroom and stood in the middle of the floor, thinking. What had happened changed all. Before her were two doors, both open, one into the obscurity of the hall and the other into the riotous glow of the flowering porch. That was her choice, and she was free to make it: Monte, and all the pleasant things of life, the luxuries she had learned to crave, ease, brilliancy, the jewels of existence spread before her; and below, through the other door, her husband and struggle — Andrew, stricken and staggering, under all his assumption of bravado.

And at that moment, below, a door slammed with the suddenness of a pistol shot.

She shrieked, and in a blind, unreasoning panic, ran down the stairs, crying his name, and flung into the library. He stood up, staring at her in surprise. She put out her hands as though to touch him, and fell back against the wall, her hands to her heart.

"Andrew! Andrew — I heard — I thought — Good God, I thought you had killed yourself!"

He had started hurriedly to her side. At her words he drew back.

"I am not made of that stuff," he said, cut to the quick. "I should think you would have known that."

She looked at him and shook her head sadly, once, twice. His pride could no longer wound her. She had seen, beneath the mask, the raw wound in his soul. What she did came on the impulse of the moment, born in the revealing horror in her soul. A moment before she had seen him stretched before her on the carpet, dead — a bleeding, trickling gash across the forehead which he had held so high.

"Andrew, listen!" she cried in anguish, as though there in the room the shadow of death were still lurking. "Andrew, listen to me — answer me! Oh, don't be hard — don't be bitter; answer me honestly."

He stood staring at her, no longer defiant, but so broken that in his need he put out his arm, seizing the table to steady himself.

"Andrew, is it too late?"

A look of fear, as though before an impossible solution, came to him. He put his hand to his eyes wearily.

"What do you mean?" he said in a whisper.

"Oh, Andrew, if you'll only hold out your hand to me!" she said incoherently. "If you'll only do that, I'll come, I'll stand by you, I'll make you forget it all! Can't you — won't you just hold out your hand — to show you want me?"

And all at once the bars broke in his soul. He tried to speak — nodded, and held out his arms to her.

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